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The Robinson Crusoe Myth: A comparative Study of *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe), *Coral Island*, *Lord of the Flies* and *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*

by

Ahmed S. Bangura

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Comparative Literature

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Robinson Crusoe Myth: A comparative Study of *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe), *Coral Island*, *Lord of the Flies* and *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* submitted by Ahmed S. Bangura in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Comparative Literature.

A.G. Pugh .....

Supervisor

.....

Shirley J. Neuman .....

Date April 16, 1987

DEDICATION

To my friend Berra, to my "parents", Haja Hawa, Mustapha and Kadiatu, and in loving memory of my father, Ibrahim Bangura.

ABSTRACT

Very few novels match the popularity and longevity of *Robinson Crusoe*. Fewer yet have been used so extensively in defence or illustration of such a wide variety of ideological positions. Jean-Jacques Rousseau saw Robinson Crusoe as an embodiment of his concept of the 'bon sauvage.' Classical political economists used Crusoe's activities in his period of isolation to illustrate the rudimentary processes of political economy. Karl Marx used him as anecdotal material in his idealization of 'use-value.' To many, Crusoe is the archetypal empire-builder and evangelist. But perhaps his most widespread image is that of the 'self-made man', the Promethean figure who triumphs in spite of his isolation — a celebration of the Western spirit. Indeed, so many ideologies have been read into the story of Defoe's hero that he has become one of the fundamental myths of Western civilization. It is the intention of this study to examine some of these ideologies, to determine to what extent they are consonant with the spirit of Defoe's text and Defoe's own ideological inclinations, and finally to see how one nineteenth and two twentieth-century writers relate to these ideologies through their varied rewriting of Defoe's story.

Ballantyne's novel *Coral Island* bears the stamp of the flattering and optimistic image of Western man that the myth, as it evolved in the nineteenth century, presents. This eurocentricity is brought under serious critical examination by novelists in light of what happened between the nineteenth century and the beginning of the second half of the twentieth, in terms both of historical events and of developments in the fields of psychology, ethnography and anthropology. The visions of Golding and Tournier, while both highly critical of the nineteenth-century myth, are, however, very different from each other — one being pessimistic and the other finally optimistic. If the story of Robinson Crusoe is still received today as a myth of contemporary relevance, it is primarily because of its capacity to

accommodate, within the simple framework of the castaway story, some of the deepest desires and fears of the culture in which it continues to evolve.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my indebtedness to my two supervisors, Professors Stephen Arnold and Anthony Purdy, who have provided not only the inspiration for the present project, but also the patience, guidance and relentless motivation without which this dream would never have come to fruition.

My general thanks also go to the administrative and teaching staff of the Department of Comparative Literature, with whom I have been involved as a student, and whose patience, guidance and encouragement during my entire M.A. programme have been most helpful.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Hereafter, references to frequently quoted works will be given in parentheses in the text.

(CI) Robert Ballantyne. *Coral Island*. London: Aldine House, 1907.

(LF) William Golding. *Lord of the Flies*. London: Faber and Faber, 1954.

(RC) Daniel Defoe. *Robinson Crusoe*. New York: The New American Library, 1961.

(VL) Michel Tournier. *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*. Paris: Gallimard, Collection Folio, 1972.

(VP) Michel Tournier. *Le Vent Paraclet*. Paris: Gallimard, Collection Folio, 1979.

INTRODUCTION

> . . . we learn as much from the varied shapes that a myth takes up as from the form in which it first arose. It is not an author but a society that metamorphoses a story into a myth, by retaining only what its unconscious needs dictate and forgetting everything else.[1]

In the preface to *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Robinson Crusoe,* Frank Ellis, the editor, is careful to specify that the purpose of the volume is to "recall attention to the book behind the myth" and not to explore the myth itself. Talking about the potency of the Crusoe myth, he cites the motifs of Thomas Tweedy's Victorian parlor suite in oak (ca. 1852), which had been on exhibition in London. The motifs represent certain edifying scenes from *The Life and Strange Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*:

> Robinson Crusoe sheltered beneath a broad goatskin umbrella, Robinson Crusoe catechizing Friday; Friday baiting the bear in the tree. For sale in all the London book-shops was Muriel Spark's novel, *Robinson,* . . . And the current production at the Palladium was a pantomime in two acts entitled *Robinson Crusoe* . . .[2]

The editor concludes by saying that, as "these witnesses testify, Robinson Crusoe has become a myth of great potency and wide application. Even in France a large umbrella is still called 'un Robinson'."[3] Indeed, these observations give us an idea of the mythical status that Robinson Crusoe has come to assume in Western civilization. If the interest of this editor is, however, in the book behind the myth, the purpose of the present study is to explore some aspects of the myth itself as it has been taken up and developed by later writers.

Robinson Crusoe certainly deserves a place within the history of ideas. It is in this regard that Ian Watt observes that

---

[1]Ian Watt, "'Robinson Crusoe' as a Myth," *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* (April 1951) 97. This and all subsequent references are to this version of the article. There is another version revised by the author and published in a book edited by Michael Shinagel: *Robinson Crusoe: An Authoritative Text, Background and Sources Criticism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 311-82.
[2]Frank Ellis, ed., *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Robinson Crusoe* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969) iii.
[3]Ellis iii.

> *Robinson Crusoe* falls most naturally into place, not with other novels, but with the great myths of Western civilization, with *Faust*, *Don Juan* and *Don Quixote*. All these have as their basic plots, their enduring images, a single-minded pursuit by the protagonist of one of the characteristic desires of western man . . .[4]

Hence we see today in Robinson Crusoe less Defoe's hero than one of the more important myths of Western civilization. It is the intention of the present study to examine some of the ideologies which have been read into Defoe's novel, to determine to what extent they tally with the spirit of the text and Defoe's own ideological inclinations, and finally to see how one nineteenth-century and two twentieth-century writers react to these ideologies through their rewriting of Defoe's story.

Ian Watt's article "'Robinson Crusoe' as a myth" has been widely received as the most important contribution on the subject. Recent critics have, however, objected to Watt's thesis, on the grounds that it is not consonant with *Robinson Crusoe* and Defoe's beliefs. Of course, such criticism springs from a failure to make a distinction between the hero in the novel and that same hero as a mythical figure, a distinction Watt makes explicitly at the outset of his article. We shall therefore endeavour to examine such problems in Defoe criticism, while going beyond the scope of Watt's essay in certain crucial respects. Watt does not, for example, deal with the role of creative writers in the canonization and perpetuation of the myth. We shall attempt, in a modest way, to remedy this situation, as we believe that a study of the Robinson Crusoe myth would be incomplete without an examination of the ways in which literary works promote or contest ideologies attaching to a particular story-situation or hero.

It is in this respect that consideration of *Coral Island* (1858) is relevant. This novel, written in the Victorian age, bears the stamp of the ideologies, fears and aspirations of Western man typical of the myth as interpreted by that age. It will become evident in reading Ballantyne's novel that its source of inspiration is less Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* than the myth

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[4]Watt 95.

the novel has generated. Moreover, within the economy of our thesis, *Coral Island* serves a double function, both as a nineteenth-century variant of the Crusoe myth and as the immediate model for William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), one of the twentieth-century reworkings of the myth we propose to study — the other being Michel Tournier's *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967).

The main object of our thesis is to determine, through a comparative analysis of these two very different novels, how the Crusoe myth has evolved in the twentieth century and how, in two of its more prominent variants, it differs from the standard nineteenth-century version. No such comprehensive approach to the subject has been undertaken before. Comparative studies have been done between *Robinson Crusoe* and *Coral Island*, *Coral Island* and *Lord of the Flies*, *Lord of the Flies* and *Robinson Crusoe*, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* and *Robinson Crusoe*. No study, however, has compared *Lord of the Flies* and *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*. My thesis will attempt not only to situate Michel Tournier's novel in relation to the English texts, it will, above all, establish an overall context by viewing *Robinson Crusoe* as a generic text: the stem of a family tree which bears both loyal and subversive branches, patterned and nourished by the different ideological layers which the roots have had to penetrate.

The first chapter defines the conception of myth that the thesis is going to explore: one that is shared by writers such as Ian Watt, Michel Tournier, and Jean Baudrillard. The importance of making a distinction between the hero in a novel and that same hero metamorphosed into a mythical figure, as well as the problems that arise from a failure to do so, will be examined and illustrated with specific reference to Defoe criticism. There will be a re-examination from this point of view of Ian Watt's thesis, as well as a critical look at the censorship and distortion involved in Rousseau's idealization of Crusoe as 'noble savage'. Marx's idealization of 'use-value' will be examined in a similar light. The aspect of the myth that is perhaps most alive in our imagination today is that of Crusoe as the 'self-made man',

triumphing in spite of his isolation, a celebration of human ingenuity and endurance. The problems with this interpretation, which ignores, among other things, Crusoe's tremendous luck with original stock, will be raised in our discussion. The image of Western man which emanates from this aspect of the myth is very flattering, and one that is complemented by other aspects: the imperialist and evangelical facets of the myth. The far-reaching consequences of this myth, such as its ultimate justification and sanctification of capitalism and colonialism, will also be explored. After a discussion of Jean Baudrillard's critique of the ways in which Marx and the classical political economists use the Crusoe myth to illustrate their theories, the first chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of *Coral Island* as a fictional variant of the Crusoe myth. Ballantyne's boys — the 'collective Crusoe' — achieve brilliant success as castaways, evangelists and imperialists, a success attesting to the superiority of Western civilization, to the perfectibility of man and hence to the possibility of an Earthly Paradise.

The second chapter studies the relationship between *Lord of the Flies* and the Robinson Crusoe myth as filtered through *Coral Island*. Golding's parodic and satiric intention was to write a realistic novel about real boys on a real island and to show what they would make of their situation. In fact, Golding's boys make a thorough mess of things; instead of civilizing and evangelizing savages, as do Ballantyne's boys, they themselves gradually regress to a state of bestial savagery. Golding thus attempts to refute Ballantyne's cheerful optimism, denouncing it as being naïve and banal in its confidence in Western civilization's ability to address the perennial problems of man, which, in Golding's view, spring from man's very bestial nature. Golding thus parodies at once the concept of the noble savage, the notion of man's original goodness or perfectibility, and the possibility of an Earthly Paradise.

Chapter three is another comparative study, much like that of the preceding chapter, but this time of Tournier's and Defoe's novels. As André Thiel rightly comments:

> Il y a bien longtemps que Robinson a échappé à son auteur et qu'il s'en est allé rejoindre le vaste royaume des personnages mythiques. Les dimensions de ces héros s'accommodent assez des préoccupations contradictoires des générations qui se succèdent. Celles-ci y distillent leurs rêves, y introduisent l'écho de leur siècle.[5]

This chapter examines the aspects of the myth which have been transformed, parodied or reversed by Michel Tournier, as well as the ideological and metaphysical orientations informing these metamorphoses.

Our concluding chapter recapitulates the central question, comparing the ways in which the two twentieth century writers — William Golding and Michel Tournier — have transformed the myth, and assessing the philosophical and historical shifts that have inspired these reworkings of the myth. Finally, we indicate some avenues for further research on certain aspects of the Robinson Crusoe myth, especially in the area of African fiction, which is rich in the thematics of the Crusoe-Friday encounter — the confrontation of Western civilization and third-world cultures in the colonial and post-colonial saga.

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[5]André Thiel, "*Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*: Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie française," *La Revue Nouvelle* 47 (1968) 98.

CHAPTER ONE

ROBINSON CRUSOE: NOVEL AND MYTH

> On dirait que chaque génération a éprouvé le besoin de se raconter, de se reconnaître et ainsi de se mieux connaître à travers cette histoire. Robinson a très vite cessé d'être un héros de roman pour devenir un personnage mythologique.(VP 219)

The distinction between the hero in a novel and that same hero metamorphosed into a mythical figure is a crucial one. For it is very easy while discussing the mythical status of a hero to slip into an exegesis of the novel in which the hero first appears, or even to find oneself objecting to some of the mythical images associated with that hero by appealing to the 'facts' of the original story.

Man has always sought to define himself, his environment and the dominant aspects of his culture through myths which give meaning to life, illustrating in story form the ideologies, fears and aspirations of their specific cultures. Taken together, the myths of a social group constitute the collective and yet heterogeneous soul of its culture. Our perception of ourselves informs our myths which in turn mould our conception of the world and our place in it. Man can thus be defined, in Tournier's words, as a mythological animal: "L'homme ne devient homme, n'acquiert un sexe, un cœur et une imagination d'homme que grâce au bruissement d'histoires, au kaléidoscope d'images qui entourent le petit enfant dès le berceau et l'accompagnent jusqu'au tombeau" (VP 191). This is why Tournier, in the wake of La Rochefoucauld and Denis de Rougemont, believes that nobody would fall in love if he never heard the word 'love.'

In our own literary culture, sometimes it happens that a story which was in no way intended by its author as a myth becomes one through the collective mediation of society, and it is this aspect of myth-making that this study seeks to explore. When certain features of a

story-situation and its hero embody the beliefs, aspirations and ideologies of a culture or civilization, those features can be isolated, amplified, given prominence and meaning that may even contradict the general spirit of the original story and the author's own ideological inclinations. Such a process of amplification, distortion and reduction will usually involve the appearance of other texts, sometimes written as variants of the original story, sometimes taking the form of commentaries or 'applications' of that story. Hence, as Ian Watt puts it, although a myth is generated from a story, "it is not an author, but a society that metamorphoses . . . [that] story into a myth by retaining only what its unconscious needs dictate and forgetting everything else."[6]

In *Le Vent Paraclet*, Michel Tournier establishes a clear distinction between purely fictional characters and mythical heroes. A first distinguishing feature is that the former never actually leave the world of the printed page: "Ils sont prisonniers des œuvres où ils apparaissent" (VP 189). If occasionally they do appear on the stage or on the screen as do Stendhal's Julien Sorel and Balzac's Vautrin (examples of purely fictional heroes), it is because the novels which gave them life have been given theatrical and cinematic interpretations. Moreover, however popular these heroes become, they never eclipse the renown of their respective authors. Mythical characters on the other hand are somewhat different. Michel Tournier cites the example of Don Juan, hero of *Le Séducteur de Séville* written by Tirso de Molina in 1630. Who has not heard of the character, yet how many people know the author or the work? Don Juan has been seen everywhere "de génération en génération dans des comédies, des romans, des opéras. On dirait que chaque pays, chaque époque a voulu donner sa version particulière du héros qui incarne la révolte du sexe contre l'ordre, contre tous les ordres" (VP 190).

The popularity of a mythical character can thus be seen to be directly proportional to the obscurity of his creator. But such popularity, as Tournier further explains, is of a peculiar

[6]Watt 97.

nature:

> Si don Juan a animé tant de vies imaginaires, c'est sans doute parce qu'il a sa place dans la vie réelle. Si nous le rencontrons dans tant d'œuvres, c'est parce que nous le rencontrons dans la vie. Il y a des don Juan autour de nous, il y a du don Juan en nous. C'est l'un des modèles fondamentaux grâce auxquels nous donnons un contour, une forme, une effigie repérée à nos aspirations et à nos humeurs. (VP 190)

Indeed, so established is Don Juan's status as a mythical character that he has long since escaped from the pages of Tirso's work, to inhabit a vaster kingdom, that of popular culture.

Tournier's analysis suggests the two dimensions of heroes such as Don Juan and Robinson Crusoe: their 'reality' as fictional characters, and their 'reality' as culture heroes, as mythical characters. It is thus essential, as this study will illustrate, to bear in mind that the two dimensions are not always congruent. What these heroes embody is not always consonant with the intentions of their creators. Robinson Crusoe, as Tournier rightly points out, is no longer simply Defoe's hero (the hero of a novel); he has invaded the world:

> Car en même temps que Robinson Crusoé s'échappait de l'œuvre où il était apparu pour animer des dizaines d'autres œuvres sous les avatars différents, sa popularité dépassait et éclipsait celle de son auteur. Bien de tous les hommes, Robinson est l'un des éléments constitutifs de l'âme de l'homme occidental. (VP 221)

Indeed, the Robinson Crusoe story is one of the most potent myths of modern Western civilization. The apotheosis of Defoe's novel is evidenced as early as the eighteenth century, by the proliferation of translations, imitations, and adaptations of the novel; Pat Rogers reports that "by 1900, there were at least 200 English editions, including abridged texts; 110 translations and 277 imitations, headed by works such as *Quall Peter*, *Wilkins*, and *The Swiss Family Robinson*."[7] Apart from the various translations there are also versions of the story with a strong national character (French, German, Swiss, etc.). The nineteenth century witnessed the production of 'Robinsonades' with many different variants adapted to a wide variety of interests, age and cultural groups. Nor has the flow of Robinsonades abated in the twentieth century. Pat Rogers records that "*Crusoe* takes up thirty-five columns in the British

[7]Pat Rogers, *Robinson Crusoe* (London, Boston, Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1979) 11. The two following quotations are from p. 14.

Library catalogue; merely to list new versions eats up several centimetres annually." There have even been operas and pantomimes made of *Robinson Crusoe*. In this respect, Rogers believes that "[N]o one will wish to argue that suitability for adaptation into pantomime form is a major test of a great artistic creation; but I cannot resist the feeling that the same mythic quality underlies Crusoe's enduring success in both modes." Indeed, like Ian Watt, Michel Tournier and many others, Frank Ellis is of the opinion that "*Robinson Crusoe* has become a myth of great potency and wide application."[8] This consensus has not however guaranteed any unanimity as to exactly what myth Crusoe does embody. In spite of this general disarray, there are critics, like Pat Rogers and Anthony Purdy, who agree that Ian Watt's treatment of the question is, so far, the most complete. However, Ian Watt has been so misunderstood, to the point of misrepresentation, by some recent critics that it is necessary to restate his case in order to expose the enormous problems that are created by a failure to distinguish novel from myth.

Although a myth germinates in a story, it is not the author who determines the metamorphosis of his story into a myth, nor is the myth necessarily congruent with the spirit of the novel or the author's intentions. Ian Watt makes this point very clear:

> It is true that if we examine what Defoe actually wrote and may be thought to have intended, it appears that *Robinson Crusoe* hardly supports some of the symbolic uses to which the pressure of the needs of our society has made it serve. But this, of course, is in keeping with the status of *Robinson Crusoe* as a myth, for we learn as much from the varied shapes that a myth takes in men's minds, as from the form in which it first arose. It is not an author, but a society, that metamorphoses a story into a myth by retaining only what its unconscious needs dictate and forgetting everything else.[9]

André Thiel, following Michel Tournier, makes a similar observation relating to Robinson Crusoe:

> . . . Il y a bien longtemps que Robinson a échappé à son auteur et qu'il s'en est allé rejoindre le vaste royaume des personnages mythiques. Les dimensions de ces héros s'accommodent assez des préoccupations contradictoires des générations qui

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[8]Ellis iii.
[9]Watt 97.

se succèdent. Celles-ci y distillent leurs rêves, y introduisent l'écho de leur siècle.[10]

Hence, to object to a certain mythical aspect of a hero or a story by appealing to the sources in the original novel or the author's intentions is to miss the point. Certainly, a critic may, out of intellectual interest, endeavour to examine which shape of the myth corresponds more or less to the original author's beliefs and intentions; he may also find it interesting to expose internal inconsistencies within a certain mythical strand. This is not, however, the nature of George Starr's objection to Ian Watt's reading of the myth of the 'Dignity of labour' as embodied by Robinson Crusoe. His objection is based on doubts as to "whether such an interpretation does justice either to Defoe's intentions or to the facts of the narrative."[11] He thus attempts to refute another critic's reading of the *myth* of Robinson Crusoe by appealing to the *text* which begat the myth, thereby missing Watt's point completely. It is on similar grounds that Diana Spearman objects to the myth of *homo economicus*: "It cannot possibly be true on the conscious level. No one in his senses would choose the story of a man cast alone on an uninhabited island to illustrate a theory which only applies to the exchange of goods and services."[12] But myths do not function on the 'conscious level'. Nor is myth-making by any means the exclusive province of informed intellectuals; it is society which distills its desires, aspirations and ideologies into a story to make a myth, which is why far more people have heard about Robinson Crusoe than have actually read Defoe's novel and why we have come to think of Crusoe as "one of the founding myths of modern Western civilization, to be named in the same breath as Tristan and Don Juan, Faust and Don Quixote."[13]

Having made these clarifications, the question as to what myth Robinson Crusoe embodies still remains to be answered. To what uses have the pressures, aspirations and

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[10]Thiel 97.
[11]George A. Starr, "Robinson Crusoe and the Myth of Mammon," Ellis 103.
[12]Diana Spearman, *The Novel and Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) 166.
[13]Anthony Purdy, "From Defoe's 'Crusoe', to Tournier's 'Vendredi': The Metamorphosis of a Myth," *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 11.2 (June 1984) 216.

ideologies of Western civilization led Western man to put Robinson Crusoe? Since myths are generated by stories, Erhard Reckwitz's general observations on 'Robinsonades' are relevant to our purpose:

> On a physical level the plot of any *Robinsonade* is both initiated and necessitated by an act of isolation. The moment the castaway is flung on the beach of his desert island he is deprived of all the amenities of Western culture, and it is that lack which determines his subsequent actions. On a less literal level isolation stands for a kind of experimental stripping of everything that in a complex society may obscure his inherent qualities. Robinson reduced to a "mere state of nature" embodies the concept of man struggling for life in its purest form. Thus the desert island gains the status of a laboratory where a representative individual can be examined in the confined space of a miniature world and under controlled conditions.[14]

The limits used here to define the 'Robinsonade' correspond more closely to Robinson Crusoe the myth than to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* which extends well beyond the desert island episode. Isolation or solitude, which Michel Tournier considers "la plaie la plus pernicieuse de l'homme occidental contemporain" (VP 221-22), constitutes the raw material from which Crusoe's mythical statues are built. Jean-Jacques Rousseau is very specific about the centrality of Crusoe's period of isolation:

> Ce roman débarrassé de tout son fatras, commençant au naufrage de Robinson près de son isle et finissant à l'arrivée du vaisseau qui vient l'en tirer sera tout à la fois l'amusement et l'instruction d'Emile durant l'époque dont il est ici question.[15]

The last two volumes of Defoe's trilogy are thus of little relevance to this thesis, since they are not part of the fertile ground on which the mythical grain was sown.

Ian Watt has described this tendency of myths, "in transmission, to be whittled down to a single, significant situation."[16] His approach to the subject is interesting: "But even if we ask what is the essential social meaning of that one episode, that solitude, many answers suggest themselves."[17] Thus, Society is the book to be read, as it displays a mosaic of the mythical images of Robinson Crusoe. But the diffusion of these images is so subtle and

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[14]Erhard Reckwitz, *Die Robinsonade. Themen und Formen einer literarischen Gattung, Bochumer Anglistische Studien, 4 (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1976) 639.*
[15]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile ou de l'éducation* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1969) 3: 455
[16]Watt 96.
[17]Watt 97.

heterogeneous that one needs lenses to perceive them. These are provided by those writers and theorists whose views on Robinson Crusoe translate certain ideological strands informed by the aspirations, fears and desires of Western man. Prominent among these writers are Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the classical political economists, Karl Marx, Ian Watt and, more recently, Jean Baudrillard. The motifs of Thomas Tweedy's Victorian parlour suite in oak will serve to bring into focus some of the more visible images which underlie the theories of these thinkers: "Robinson Crusoe sheltered beneath a broad goatskin umbrella"; "Robinson Crusoe catechizing Friday"; "Friday baiting the bear in the tree."[18] Ian Watt relates another picturesque example along similar lines: "In 1848, an enterprising French industrialist started a restaurant up a tree, a particularly fine chestnut, in a wood near Paris: he called it 'Robinson' and now restaurateurs vie for the title in a village of that name."[19]

What popular image of Robinson Crusoe can we distill from these few examples? There is certainly the primitivist image, the idea of man using his ingenuity and readily available material to protect himself from the natural world (against rain, for example); there is a celebration of manual labour (carpentry) and of invention; there is, finally, the image of the civilizing and evangelical mission of Western man. It is also revealing that all but one of these images — the bear baiting — are taken from the island episode, the period of isolation. And here, reasons for Western man's obsession with solitude are at once obvious and paradoxical, for Crusoe's solitude is at the origin of two facets of the myth. One aspect portrays his isolation in a positive light, either because it marks a return to the state of prelapsarian man or because it enables Crusoe to free himself from the pressures and demands of society, thus permitting him to be a more fulfilled individual who has to work for the simple satisfaction of his needs. It is thus not surprising that this aspect of the myth interests not only primitivists, such as Rousseau, but also a wide variety of economic thinkers as a

[18]Ellis iii.
[19]Watt 97.

favourite example for the illustration of their systems. The other facet of the myth, which is perhaps more alive in our imagination, presents Crusoe's isolation negatively, as a test of endurance and a case study of man's survival instinct. As Ian Watt puts it: "Crusoe lives in the imagination mainly as a triumph of human achievement and enterprise, and as a favourite example of the elementary processes of political economy."[20] This is why the island episode is very important for, in John Robert Moore's words, "it is in the island episode, in which Crusoe comes face to face with the problems of mankind, that we have the supreme achievement."[21] Hence, "the bare fact of survival in solitude constitutes the power of the myth. We admire Crusoe for what he achieves in spite of loneliness."[22]

A third aspect of the myth is related to Crusoe's work and involves empire building and its attendant and justifying evangelical myth. As Taine puts it, in Crusoe's world, "religion consecrates labour, piety feeds patience; and man, supported on one side by his instincts, on the other by his beliefs, finds himself able to clear the land, to people, to organize and civilize continents." [23] This ethic depends on a belief in the 'dignity of labour' backed by the Calvinist ethic of the sanctification of the world by work. Let us now look at all these aspects of the myth in greater detail, relate them to Defoe's text and measure the distance between novel and myth.

The primitivist myth is usually associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Most of Rousseau's tributes to *Robinson Crusoe* appear in the third book of *Emile* (1762) where, after registering his aversion for books, Rousseau nevertheless reserves highly laudatory remarks for Defoe's novel, which he recommends as the primary text, and for a long time the only one, to be studied by Emile — his pupil — in a natural environment away from the negative

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[20]Watt 97.
[21]John Robert Moore, "Robinson Crusoe," Ellis-60.
[22]John Robert Moore, *Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) 227.
[23]Translation of Taine by H. Van Laun, (Edinburgh, 1873) 2: 153-57, quoted by Pat Rogers, *Defoe: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 160-66.

influences of society. (The choice of this book, which he considers as a treatise in natural education, is clearly not fortuitous: there are very obvious biographical similarities between Crusoe and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which do not, however enter into the scope of this thesis.)[24]

The dominant position in *Emile* is a belief in man's innate goodness and a denunciation of the corruptive influence of society. Pire defines Jean-Jacques Rousseau's image of Robinson in the following terms: "A ses yeux, Robinson symbolisait, au même titre qu'Adam, la grandeur et la puissance de l'homme vivant en harmonie avec la nature loin de l'influence néfaste de la société."[25] However, the idealization of Crusoe as the natural man is consonant neither with the spirit of Defoe's text nor with Defoe's own ideological inclinations. Crusoe, unlike Selkirk (his source of inspiration), never entertains any desire to retire into nature. As Maximillian Novak puts it, "[I]n spite of his environment, Crusoe's life is that of Rousseau's civilized man: 'Always moving, sweating, toiling, and racking his brains to find still more laborious occupations: he goes on in drudgery to his last moment, and even seeks death to put himself in a position to live'."[26] The activities of Crusoe in his period of isolation are indeed antiprimitivist. Ian Watt makes this observation:

> Defoe's 'nature' appeals not for adoration but for exploitation: the island solitude is an exceptional occasion not for undisturbed self-communion but for strenuous efforts at self-help. Inspired with this belief, Crusoe observes nature, not with the eyes of a pantheist primitive, but with the calculating gaze of colonial capitalism. Wherever he looks he sees acres that cry out for improvement, and as he settles down to the task he glows, not with noble savagery, but purposive possession.[27]

It is, moreover, interesting to see how Friday, the real savage of Defoe's story, does not really interest Rousseau, since incorporating him into his theory would detract from his idealization of Robinson Crusoe as the natural man. Such an analysis provides a vivid example

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[24]See G. Pire, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Robinson Crusoe," *Revue de littérature comparée*, 30 (1956) 480-82.
[25]Pire, 480.
[26]Maximillian Novak, *Economics and the fiction of Daniel Defoe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962) 58.
[27]Watt 100.

of the sometimes conscious textual deformation that is involved in the process of the metamorphosis of a novel into myth. Nature interests Defoe as well as Rousseau. But, to use Ian Watt's words, this situation "only allows the two authors to realize without interference their own thwarted vocations." For Rousseau, nature is a sanctuary but for Defoe, "the jungle itself must succumb to the irresistible ideology of capitalism."[28]

Crusoe's isolation in nature is also used by Rousseau to illustrate his theory of the dignity of labour, a thesis shared by Marx. Rousseau glorifies manual labour because of its educational and restorative virtues and because work, as practised by Crusoe, provides an antidote to the dehumanizing and alienating effects of the division of labour in the capitalist setting. In this respect, Crusoe's island existence, with the practical inventiveness which it demands, does not fail to impress the prophet of natural education. Pire points this out: "L'inventeur de la pédagogie axée sur l'intérêt, le besoin, et la vie a trouvé un bel exemple du génie que peut déployer un homme mis en face de la nécessité."[29] The influence of Rousseau's thesis on Western attitudes towards work is thoroughly discussed by Ian Watt.[30] As Watt points out, on the social scale, many reforms have been made which aim at reducing some of the alienating effects of specialization, by reintroducing in the recreational spheres some of those activities practised by Crusoe on his island. I would add that today there is often a certain prestige attached to products branded as 'home-made' or 'hand-made.' This idealization of Crusoe's work, as Ian Watt clearly demonstrates, has to do with our twentieth-century socio-economic arrangements:

> For the main processes by which man receives food, clothing, and shelter are only likely to become interesting when they have become alien to his common everyday experience. To enjoy the description of the elementary productive processes reveals a sophisticated taste. Obviously, primitive people can never forget for a day what Crusoe announces with the tones of one making a discovery: "It might be truly said that now I began to work for my bread. 'Tis a little wonderful,and what I believe few people have thought much upon viz, the strange multitude of little things necessary in the providing, producing, curing, dressing, making and finishing

[28]Watt 100-01.
[29]Pire 490.
[30]Watt 102-03

this one article of bread."[31]

Robinson Crusoe, the hero of solitude, thus becomes the patron saint of manual labour. As Michel Tournier observes, there is hardly anybody in modern times who has not entertained the idea of retiring into an uninhabited island to practise what he calls "le travail accordé à ces paradis ensoleillés." In this respect, Crusoe can be seen as "le saint patron de tous les bricoleurs de plein air" (VP 226).

The myth of the dignity of labour is very closely related to the view of Robinson Crusoe as the self-made man, owing his survival and tremendous success, in spite of overwhelming difficulties, to his work and ingenuity. This aspect of the myth is perhaps the one most deeply imprinted in the Western imagination. Rousseau subscribes to this myth which views Crusoe's isolation and its attendant problems as a challenge to which Crusoe has to face up:

> Robinson Crusoe dans son isle, seul, dépourvu de l'assistance de ses semblables et des instruments de tous les arts pourvoyant cependant à sa subsistance, à sa conservation, et se procurant même une sorte de bien-être, voilà un objet intéressant pour tout âge et qu'on a mille moyens de rendre agréable aux enfants.[32]

Robinson Crusoe's survival in, and in spite of, his solitude constitutes the potency of the myth. This myth with its implicit faith in human reason, invention and progress, and in man's power to harness his environment and to bend it to his will, could not fail to flatter the otherwise troubled human soul. This, in Michel Tournier's opinion, is characteristic of our relationship with mythical heroes:

> Car le héros mythologique, s'il prend pied au cœur de chaque individu modeste et prosaïque se hausse en même temps au niveau d'une réussite admirable. Il est paradoxalement à la fois le double fraternel de chaque homme et une statue surhumaine qui le met de plain-pied avec l'Olympe éternel. De telle sorte que chaque héros mythologique . . . nous engage dans un processus d'*autohagiographie*. Comme je suis grand, fort, mélancolique! s'écrie le lecteur en levant les yeux du livre vers un miroir. Vraiment, il ne se savait pas si beau! (VP 226)

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[31]Watt 101-02.
[32]Rousseau 455.

The facts of Defoe's narrative, however, sustain neither such a conception of the dignity of labour nor the resultant myth of Crusoe as a self-made man. Had Crusoe himself cherished the ideology of steadfast labour, Brazil would have been the place for him to stay. Ian Watt points out Crusoe's preference for short cuts to success — the rewards of adventurers' capitalism as against the steady growth characteristic of the new economic order. Moreover, Crusoe's motivations for working are specific to his state of isolation: "On Crusoe's island unremitting toil is obligatory; there, and only there, it is instinct both with moral value and calculable personal reward."[11] Besides, as Watt points out, this myth of the self-made man ignores Crusoe's tremendous luck with capital stock. The shipwreck, which the myth would have us see as an act of divine retribution, is in reality the necessary disaster, the *deus ex machina*, which provides Crusoe with the material with which he is going to build his empire unimpeded by the realities of economic competition and political control. The heroes of Jules Verne's castaway novel are in this respect far less fortunate and more heroic, as Michel Tournier is quick to point out:

> D'abord il [Crusoé] avait reçu un véritable viatique grâce à l'épave du navire laissée à sa disposition par la civilisation. Ensuite il avait été jeté sur une île verdoyante, gorgée de fruits et peuplée d'animaux aussi peu redoutables que les fameuses chèvres. . .
>
> Les cinq naufragés de Jules Verne n'ont droit qu'à un îlot rocheux, battu par les flots.(VP 219)

The element of textual deformation in the process of the metamorphosis of novel to myth is once again quite plain. The ideology of the dignity of labour has been read into Crusoe's work in isolation, but the reader's ignorance about the elementary processes of production does not suffice to explain the appeal of Crusoe's labour. The influence of the Protestant work ethic should not be minimized. Ian Watt makes the connection:

> The reader's ignorance of the basic processes of production is not the only source of the appeal of Crusoe's island labours. He is also affected by the obscure ethical and religious overtones which pervade Defoe's intense concentration upon each stage of Crusoe's exertions. Eventually, they fasten upon our imaginative life a picture of the human lot as heroic only when productive and of man as capable of

[11]Watt 110.

> redemption through untiring labour. As we read we share in an inspiring yet wholly credible demonstration of the vitality and interest of all the basic economic pursuits.[34]

This new attitude to work which sharply contrasts with the classical Biblical notion of work as a consequence of man's iniquity, finds its ultimate canonization in the Victorian age with the influence of the Protestant ethic of the sanctification of the world by work. Work is regarded not only as the most fruitful form of human activity but also as a kind of religious obligation, "the untiring stewardship of the Gifts of God..." Ian Watt sees the conjuncture of this "ideology of Ascetic Protestantism, or Puritanism," and the 'return to nature' credo as a happy one, as it bequeaths to the middle class a cherished aspiration: "a programme of further economic action, and a figure on whom to project a quasi-religious mystique, which retained from the ebbing fervours of Calvinism its essential social and economic teaching."[35] This programme, requiring temporary attraction to primitivism or the wide open spaces, is that of empire building. The indiscriminate nature of this sanctification of work is perhaps the most interesting aspect of this ethic, since its ultimate consequence is the sanctification of colonialism and its unavowed corollary — exploitative capitalism. Ian Watt's analysis is revealing in this regard:

> The mystique is one which distracts attention from the enormous and rapidly growing differences between the kinds of work and their economic rewards, by lumping them together under the one word 'labour' and erecting a creed which bestows the name high 'dignity' on *all* forms of activity which are subsumed under that one word.[36]

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that Crusoe, the archetypal empire builder, also embodies the evangelical myth — "Robinson Crusoe catechizing Friday" (Thomas Tweedy's Victorian parlour suite in oak). It is in this vein that critics like James Joyce see *Robinson Crusoe* as a prophecy of Empire, with Crusoe the colonizing Englishman: "Whoever rereads this simple, moving book in the light of subsequent history cannot help but fall under its prophetic

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[34]Watt 104.
[35]Watt 106.
[36]Watt 106.

spell. . ."[37] The two related myths — imperialist and evangelic — flatter Western man's intellectual superiority and bestow upon him a sacred mission — to clear the jungles of the world and spread the light of salvation (intellectual and spiritual) amongst the godless and miserable inhabitants of the world such as Friday.

Crusoe's work is not only associated with the ethic of the dignity of labour and its far-reaching consequences. Defoe's hero has also been used for the illustration of theories of utility based on the autonomous character of his work. Rousseau imagined a utopia in which human needs are immediately perceptible and the means of satisfying them readily available. This further explains his interest in Crusoe's period of isolation:

> Le plus sûr moyen de s'élever au dessus des préjugés et d'ordonner ses jugements sur les vrais rapports des choses est de se mettre à la place d'un homme isolé et de juger de tout comme cet homme en doit juger lui-même eu égard à sa propre utilité.[38]

Rousseau views Crusoe as a practical utilitarian: "Robinson eût fait beaucoup plus de cas de la boutique d'un taillandier que de tous les colifichets de Saide."[39] His theories concerning Crusoe's utilitarianism are based on the latter's independence of mind; his ability to judge the value of things based on their usefulness, and unaffected by society's scales of value.

Like Rousseau, Maximillian Novak reads a utilitarian thesis into Crusoe's work: "That labor and invention create things of use and that the value of things depends on their utility are the economic themes of Crusoe's life on his island."[40] It is however paradoxical and revealing that Novak should allude to the social character of Crusoe's work and its products:

> Crusoe's aim in all this activity is to re-create upon the microcosm of his island the standard of existence of Western civilization in his day — to duplicate in the existence of one man all the useful products required by the human race for comfort and convenience.[41]

This statement innocently underscores the superfluous nature of Crusoe's work and the

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[37]James Joyce, *Daniel Defoe*, trans. Joseph Prescott (Buffalo: State University of New York, 1964) 25.
[38]Rousseau 455.
[39]Rousseau 457.
[40]Novak 55.
[41]Novak 51.

extravagantly social character of his needs. Indeed, one can deduce from it that Crusoe's needs are far from being 'natural.' Jean Baudrillard, the French sociologist, spells out the false anthropological premises of the concept of 'natural' man and his needs in the following terms:

> La légitimité de ce concept se fonde sur l'existence d'un minimum vital anthropologique qui serait celui des 'besoins primaires' — zone irréductible où l'individu se déterminerait lui-même, puisqu'il saurait ce qu'il veut: manger, boire, dormir, faire l'amour etc. A ce niveau, il ne saurait être aliéné dans le besoin même qu'il en a, mais simplement privé des moyens de le satisfaire.[42]

But this 'natural' anthropological state is a myth; the 'minimum vital anthropologique' does not exist, the basic survival level being socially determined:

> . . . dans toutes les sociétés, il est déterminé résiduellement par l'urgence fondamentale d'un excédent: la part de Dieu, la part du sacrifice, la dépense somptuaire, le profit économique. C'est ce prélèvement de luxe qui détermine négativement le niveau de survie et non l'inverse (fiction idéaliste).[43]

Baudrillard makes his point with greater clarity with illustrations from contemporary socio-economic realities:

> Le minimum vital aujourd'hui, c'est le *standard package*, le minimum de consommation imposée. En deça, vous êtes un asocial — et la déperdition de statut, l'inexistence sociale est-elle moins grave que la faim?"[44]

Baudrillard's conclusion is obvious; man has at no time in his history possessed such basic natural desires determined by equally objective, autonomous and concrete needs. Such a statement clearly runs counter to the thesis of those prophets of 'natural needs' and idealizers of "use-value" such as Rousseau, Novak and, in a more systematic way, Karl Marx.

It is indeed Marx who theorized the autonomous character of Crusoe's work, the immediacy and transparency of his relationship with the products of his labour, abstracted, as Marx supposes them to be, from the circuit of economic exchange; for, according to Marx, everything that Crusoe produced is "exclusively the result of his own personal labour and

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[42]Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 84.
[43]Baudrillard 84-85.
[44]Baudrillard 86.

therefore simply an object of use for himself."[45] Crusoe's work and its products are supposedly independent of society, hence Marx's objection to the eighteenth-century political economists who use Crusoe's labour to illustrate the workings of their economic systems, an objection very much in line with that raised by Diana Spearman against Watt's characterization of Crusoe as *homo economicus*. But does Marx not commit the same error by using Crusoe's period of isolation to illustrate his own economic thesis — his idealization of "use-value" as opposed to "exchange-value"? Moreover, Watt exposes the unbalanced character of Marx's analysis in its failure to acknowledge that Crusoe's life exemplifies some of those very evils which Marx attributes to capitalism, such as "the process of alienation by which capitalism tends to convert man's relationships with his fellows and even to his own personality, into commodities to be manipulated."[46] Of course this objection derives from a general consideration of the entire trilogy, which is of little relevance to Marx's purpose and indeed to most of the mythical strands of Robinson Crusoe.

Perhaps Jean Baudrillard's critique of Marx is more systematic and revealing in exposing the latter's restrictive analysis of the 'fetichism' of goods in his dialectical thesis of "use-value" and "exchange-value," idealizing "use-value" as immediate and transparent as opposed to the mysticism and fetichism of "exchange-value." In this respect, Marx falls into another trap in Baudrillard's view:

> 'En opposant le 'mysticisme' obscur de la valeur marchande à la simplicité et à la transparence des rapports de Robinson à sa richesse, il est tombé dans un piège. Si on fait l'hypothèse (marxiste) que l'économie politique bourgeoise a résumé dans le mythe de Robinson toute son idéologie, il faut admettre que tout dans cette histoire s'accorde à la mystique et à la métaphysique de la pensée bourgeoise, *jusque et surtout cette 'transparence' dans les rapports de l'homme aux produits de son travail.*[47]

Baudrillard's intention is therefore to illustrate that "use-value" itself, far from being immediate and transparent, is 'fetichized,' and even more profoundly mysterious than the

[45]Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*. Quoted by Ellis 92.
[46]Watt 112.
[47]Baudrillard 169.

fetichism of "exchange-value," as it epitomizes the ideological mystifications of the bourgeoisie and of political economy in general. Baudrillard builds his argument on a quote from Marx which defines the latter's views on the masked (mystified) social character of exchange-value: "Pour définir la notion de marchandise, il importe peu de connaître son contenu particulier et sa destination exacte. Il suffit que l'article devant être marchandise — autrement dit, le support de la valeur d'échange — satisfasse un quelconque besoin social en ayant la propriété utile correspondante. Voilà tout (*Le Capital*, 1, vi)."[48] Marx's analysis is restrictive in that, in his view, it is only "exchange-value" which is socially determined while "use-value" is autonomous and not socially or historically determined. Baudrillard defines Marx's idealization of "use-value" in the following terms:

> La valeur d'usage, . . . n'apparaît pas comme rapport, social, ni donc comme lieu de fétichisation: l'utilité *en tant que telle* échappe à la détermination historique de classe: elle désigne un rapport final objectif de la destination propre qui ne se masque pas et dont la transparence défie l'histoire *en tant que forme* (même si son contenu change continuellement avec les déterminations sociales et culturelles).[49]

In contrast with this transparent logic of "use-value," "exchange-value" disguises its social determinant under the smoke screen of the quality and the attributes of the object itself. Marx unmasks this fetichism and posits that while objects considered in terms of their exchange-value can be approximated and substituted for each other on the basis of the abstract social work that produces them, the same goods from the point of view of use-value are incomparable and cannot be exchanged; in Baudrillard's words:

> . . . le lard vaut comme lard, et le coton comme coton, ils ne peuvent être substitués l'un à l'autre, ni donc "s'échanger", alors que la valeur d'échange est abstraite et générale. Bien sûr, il ne saurait y avoir valeur d'échange sans qu'il y ait valeur d'usage, les deux sont couplés mais il n'y a pas implication des deux au sens fort.[50]

Baudrillard refuses this idealization and argues that "use-value" is itself socially determined. The anthropological premise which presents an image of man in immediate (unmediated)

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[48]Baudrillard 154.
[49]Baudrillard 155.
[50]Baudrillard 154.

awareness of his needs as objective, natural and given realities is a myth:

> . . . l'homme n'est pas là d'abord, avec ses besoins et voué par la Nature à s'accomplir en tant qu'Homme. Cette proposition, qui est celle du finalisme spiritualiste, définit en fait dans notre société la *fonction-individu*, mythe fonctionnel de la société productiviste. Tout le système de valeurs individuelles, toute la religion de la spontanéité, de la liberté, de la créativité, etc., sont lourds de l'option productiviste. Même les fonctions vitales sont immédiatement 'fonctions' du système. Nulle part l'homme n'est en face de ses propres besoins.[51]

Moreover, man himself is a 'structure idéologique.' Hence his needs, far from being natural and exclusively dependent on his autonomous desires, operate within a much larger system which determines the desires in the same way that the system of "exchange-value" controls labour, being as it is, labour's source of value. In refusing to acknowledge the social character of man's needs, Marx paradoxically promotes a certain mysticism: "la mythologie (véritable 'mystique' rationaliste)"[52] which considers the relationship between man and objects conceived in terms of "use-value" as transparent, concrete, objective, natural and universal; a mysticism that is even more mysterious than that of "exchange-value": "Dans la valeur d'usage, la valeur s'enveloppe cette fois d'un mystère total, puisqu'elle se fonde dans l'anthropologie, dans l'évidence d'une naturalité, dans une référence originelle indépassable."[53] The comparison does not stop there:

> Dans la valeur d'échange le travail social disparaît. Dans le système de la valeur d'usage, c'est la résorption sans traces de tout le procès de travail idéologique et historique qui amène le sujet à se penser comme individu, défini par ses besoins et ses satisfactions et à s'intégrer par là idéalement la marchandise.[54]

The strategic nature of the myth of "use-value" becomes apparent: it is the "caution idéologique" of "exchange-value." Since needs are the property of all men, men thereby become equal: "[C]'est la démocratie des 'besoins', sécularisation de l'égalité virtuelle de tous les hommes devant Dieu;"[55] it is a rallying point for all men without discrimination, a sphere of universal reconciliation of mankind divided by "exchange-value." Paradoxically, the most

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[51]Baudrillard 92.
[52]Baudrillard 160.
[53]Baudrillard 167.
[54]Baudrillard 166.
[55]Baudrillard 166.

potent strategic value of this ideology is its ultimate naturalization of exchange-value:

> . . . elle est ce par quoi est scellé idéologiquement le système de production et d'échange, grâce à l'institution d'une anthropologie idéaliste qui soustrait la valeur d'usage et les besoins à leur logique historique pour les inscrire dans une éternité formelle: celle de l'utilité pour les objets, celle de l'appropriation utile des objets par l'homme dans le besoin.[56]

I would add that this ideology is the real 'opium of the people' in the consumer society.

It is in a similar vein that Baudrillard sees in Marx's confrontation of Man and his capacity to work on the one hand and his needs on the other a *résumé* of the fundamental mysticism of political economy: "l'assomption de la valeur d'échange dans la valeur d'usage, l'accomplissement de l'économique dans la finalité providentielle de l'utilité."[57] This analysis explains why Robinson Crusoe has come to embody apparently contradictory ideologies. He is at once the darling of both naturalists and manufacturers, a fact which is further explained by Baudrillard:

> Il devient, dans son travail, valeur d'usage pour un système de production, et simultanément les biens et les produits deviennent valeur d'usage pour lui, prennent un sens en fonction de ses besoins, désormais légalisés comme 'nature.'[58]

Which is why Baudrillard finally defines the Robinson Crusoe myth as a bourgeois version of the myth of 'Earthly Paradise':

> Le mythe de Robinson est l'avatar bourgeois du mythe du Paradis terrestre. Tout grand ordre social de production (bourgeois ou féodal) entretient un mythe idéal, qui est à la fois mythe d'accomplissement et mythe d'origine. L'économie politique se soutient du grand mythe d'accomplissement de l'homme selon la loi naturelle des besoins comme la théologie se soutient du mythe de l'accomplissement de l'homme selon la loi divine. La même finalité se reconnaît ici et là; celle d'une relation idéale de l'homme à Dieu à travers la foi et la règle divine, la Providence. Bien sûr cette vocation idéale est toujours et d'emblée compromise, mais la finalité demeure, et la valeur d'usage ensevelie, sous la valeur d'échange comme l'harmonie naturelle du Paradis terrestre brisée par le péché et la souffrance, restent inscrites comme des essences invulnérables, promises au terme de l'Histoire, à une future rédemption.[59]

The advantages of Baudrillard's criticism of Marx and by extension of classical political economy are spelled out by Anthony Purdy:

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[56]Baudrillard 167.
[57]Baudrillard 169-70.
[58]Baudrillard 170.
[59]Baudrillard 170-71.

> Baudrillard's critique of Marx — and *a fortiori* of classical political economy — has the considerable advantage of reinstating Robinson's solitary cult of use-value, downplayed by Watt in favour of more patently 'economic' behaviour, at the very heart of the Crusoe myth. But that is not all; for it also shows quite clearly that there is no real conflict between the view of Crusoe as a mythically naturalized and universalized *homo economicus* and his gradual acceptance of the workings of divine Providence.[40]

Moreover, I would add that Baudrillard's thesis reconciles to a certain extent the views of those who use Crusoe to illustrate socio-economic theories and ideologies and those who see in Defoe's novel an allegory of salvation.

The complexity of the myth is thus not to be underestimated. In the imagination of Western man Robinson embodies the 'noble savage,' the empire builder and colonizer, the evangelist, the utilitarian, economic man and above all the hero of solitude. Since myth-making is a collective and unconscious social process, our analysis of the myth will not be complete if it fails to acknowledge the role of creative writers in the canonization, perpetuation and evolution of Crusoe's tale. The sheer number of imitations, variations and adaptations of Defoe's novel from the eighteenth century to date is an indication of the story's mythic potency. Our reading of one such castaway story, *Coral Island* (1858), will therefore fulfill a double function, insofar as Ballantyne's novel is at once a nineteenth-century variant of the Crusoe myth and the immediate model for William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

It is significant that while Robinson Crusoe never entertains any Rousseauesque desire to retire to nature, the narrator of *Coral Island* has always cherished the dream of living on some luxuriant Coral Island: "But of all the places of which they (the seamen) told me, none captivated my imagination so much as the Coral Islands of the Southern Seas" (CI 5). Though it would be wrong to say that Ralph anticipates the shipwreck, or that the boys would have made Selkirk's request to be abandoned on the island, it is clear that the shipwreck becomes a fortunate disaster — not in the sense that it bequeaths them the tools and original

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[40]Purdy 221.

stock to build an empire, as in Crusoe's case, but in the sense that it shuttles the boys into an "ancient Paradise" far away from the complications of civilized society, for the fulfillment of an ancient dream, that of life in those fertile lands "where summer reigned nearly all the year round, — where the trees were laden with a constant harvest of luxuriant fruit, — where the climate was almost perpetually delightful. . ." (CI 5). This romantic reverie suggests an attitude to nature closer to Rousseau's idealization of the natural man than to Crusoe's hegemonic relationship with his environment. The island itself corresponds to this picture just as to the general attributes of Crusoe's: benign, plentiful, and luxuriant, an island on which Crusoe could survive if the "minimum anthropologique vital" were a reality, without transforming it into a microcosm of the civilized state.

Coral Island contains many romantic passages which allude to the self-sufficiency of the island and the superfluousness of any attempts to impose culture on it in the name of 'survival.' The question of needs is thus central in this regard. Erhard Reckwitz defines action or plot in a *Robinsonade* as what "the castaway does in order to survive. . ."[61] Survival is hence the most important dynamic in castaway stories. Reckwitz equally spells out the three basic factors of what he calls the "survival arrangement":

> The first one is his (the castaway's) personal ability to overcome the intellectual and physical difficulties of his situation. The second one is the nature of his island, which must possess a certain amount of tractability in order to be amenable to his purposes. The last one is the supernatural agency that always helps out whenever he is at his wit's end. These factors with their respective combinatory properties form what in this study has been termed a "survival-arrangement."[62]

Crusoe uses these three factors not in the service of survival in its absolute or anthropological sense, but to achieve absolute mastery of the environment leading ultimately to the creation of a miniature world according to the standards of civilized living. It is thus interesting to see how the 'superfluous' and 'extravagant' character of Crusoe's work and its products is transformed by the myth into an idealization of "use-value."

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[61]Reckwitz 651.
[62]Reckwitz 639.

Coral Island, written in the nineteenth century, bears the stamp of the utilitarian ideology which Jean Baudrillard has unmasked. While Defoe's hero pays lip-service to it, in Ballantyne's novel, utilitarianism is not only a rational and pragmatic concept, it is also a moral imperative, a positive virtue. Crusoe builds a house, the boys do not because they find the bower "so serviceable, that [they determine] not to leave it, not to attempt the building of a house, which, in such a climate, might turn out to be rather disagreeable than useful" (CI 140). On their first trip around the island they find it extravagant and foolish to carry food with them since the island is so plentiful. Unlike Crusoe, they neither gather and store large quantities of fruit nor raise animals. In spite of his "animal spirits" and play ethic, Peterkin is constantly reminded and reminds himself that "Pork not sport" is the motto of his hunting expeditions. But this novel clearly illustrates the validity of Baudrillard's thesis on the mysticism of use-value. The boys build a bower although "there was no absolute necessity for this because the air of their island was so genial and balmy that they could have slept quite well without any shelter. . ." (CI 25). They also do not "care a button for the cooking of [their] victuals, — perhaps they don't need it. . ." (CI 36), yet cook them they do. They equally "have everything ready prepared to their hands in this wonderful island, lemonade ready bottled in nuts, and loafbread growing on the trees!" (CI 51), but the boys cannot settle to being vegetarians: "a little animal food, now and then, would be agreeable as well as good for us. . ." (CI 25).

These few examples demonstrate that "use-value" and the whole concept of transparent and autonomous human needs is a myth rather than a reality. The needs of the boys are socially determined. They build the bower primarily because they are "so little used to sleeping in the open air. . ." (CI 42). They attempt living in a cave but find the change so bad that they return gladly to the bower. Although they are isolated, their needs continue to be determined by socio-economic factors. Had a merchant ship interested in buying dead penguins passed by, the boys would have certainly hunted a thousand of them in exchange for

a few more tools and goods to make their lives on the island more comfortable, so that they can "survive" and at the same time contribute to the survival of the economic system. In its general conception then, *Coral Island* is closer to being a fictional illustration of use-value than *Robinson Crusoe*, although even here use-value is proven to be a 'mysticism.' At least the boys do not undertake a thorough subjugation of their environment, yet they do survive their insular captivity. Is this then another success story along the lines of Crusoe as the hero of solitude?

It is very easy to suppose that the plurality of the castaways in *Coral Island* detracts from the boys' success in that it increases their ability to overcome the intellectual and physical difficulties of their situation. It should however be borne in mind that this potential advantage is nullified by the fact that the boys are young and inexperienced. Moreover, the plurality adds another factor to the 'survival arrangement.' "When two or more people have to survive on a desert island, these individual and environmental factors are supplemented by their collective ability to evolve a functioning social order."[63] Hence, the plurality also bears a potential danger, especially in the case of such juvenile characters who are "most unlike in many things" (CI 103). The ability to evolve a functioning social order will rather add to than detract from the brilliance of their success.

One can also add a very important factor to the arrangement: the castaways' original stock. Paulette Michel-Michot makes a point in this regard which is worth examining: "He [Crusoe] starts on his island with nothing except a few things and tools he has saved from the wreck and ends up in a world of make-believe."[64] In comparison to Crusoe, Ballantyne's boys "enjoy a situation they have inherited, and simply belong to the British Empire. This accounts for their complacency and their feeling that nothing can really resist them."[65] This reading of

[63]Reckwitz 639-40.
[64]Paulette Michel-Michot, "The Myth of Innocence," *Revue des langues vivantes* 28 (1962) 517.
[65]Michel-Michot 517.

the two novels clearly ignores Crusoe's luck with original stock and the fact that it is rather Ballantyne's boys that have very few items salvaged from the shipwreck. It is also evident that Michel-Michot is subscribing to the myth of Robinson Crusoe as the self-made man rather than exploring the 'facts' of Defoe's story. Her conclusion is even more revealing in this regard: "That is why Crusoe is alone on his island, his energy, common sense and practical intelligence are all he needs."[46] Clearly, it would be difficult to see how Defoe's hero "contributed to the British Empire," for although Crusoe certainly survives on his island and eventually converts it into a colony (a temporary situation), that is where his empire building really stops. *Robinson Crusoe* as a myth is a prophecy of empire but Defoe's novel by no means witnesses the fulfillment of that prophecy. It is rather *Coral Island* written in the nineteenth century in the full flush of British expansionism that sees the prophecy fulfilled. Is Ballantyne then subscribing to the myth of the superiority of Western man and civilization?

Ballantyne certainly presents a flattering image of the British child in his novel. But is the success ascribable to the protagonists' being children, British, civilized, Christian, or something quite different? In other words, do we find a celebration of childhood innocence, of the superiority of Western civilization or exclusively of Christianity? The answers to these questions are not straightforward. These boys are peculiar. Though of disparate temperaments and dispositions, "there was, indeed, no note of discord whatever in the symphony [they] played together on that sweet Coral Island," because they were all tuned to "the same key, namely, that of love" (CI 103). Love is one of the highest Christian virtues, so instead of a cacophony the boys produce a symphony; love transforms the boys' differences and inadequacies into virtues in the context of the triumvirate. Jack's grave, philosophical and bookish predilections complement Peterkin's animal spirits. The qualities of leadership are innate in Jack but so is Peterkin's dexterity, and Ralph provides the perfect mean between the two extremes. Thus, the legitimacy of Jack's leadership is unquestioned, based as it is on

[46]Michel-Michot 517.

common consent and not on coercion. Theirs is a rational society, or at least rationalism in its orthodox form is their ideal. Hence, like the Robinson Crusoe of the myth, the children are not visited by the psychological ailments of real castaway situations. Since everything can be rationally explained, these children, unlike normal children, know no fear of the mysterious, the ghostly:

> I neither believe in ghosts nor feel uneasy. . . I never saw a ghost myself, and I never met with anyone who had; and I have generally found that strange and unaccountable things have almost always been accounted for, and found to be quite simple, on close examination. (CI 59)

This statement by Jack anticipates the inhibiting rationalism of Piggy in *Lord of the Flies*. One can contrast this rationalist phlegm with Crusoe's self-imposed confinement on the discovery of footprints on the island.

The ultimate explanation for this moral fortitude is Civilization and Christianity, or shall we simply say, Christianity seen as including the former. The children succeed because Christ is on their side; Christ who alone "is both able and willing to save your body and your soul" (CI 10). Hence, the novel is less an unqualified idealization of Western man than a celebration of the redeeming power of Christianity. While some critics tend to minimize this religious dimension of the novel, it is not at all evident from this novel that Ballantyne has an "unshaken faith in the superiority of the white race"[67] or that "the social and moral scale of things is clearly delineated. Britons come at the top of it, savages and pigs at the bottom."[68] There are white as well as black savages. Those at the bottom of the ladder share one thing in common — they are not Christians. The safest thing that one can say is that the novel is a celebration of Western civilization in its deepest religious and cultural dimension. Without the intervention of divine providence, the boys would have perished in prison. Their release, preceded by the spectacular conversion of the natives, comes in the form of a *deus ex*

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[67]Virginia Tiger, *The Dark Fields of Discovery* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974) 50.
[68]Peter Green, "The World of William Golding," *Review of English Literature* (April 1960) 64.

machina. These are the words that breathe freedom into their despairing souls: "The Lord has unloosed the bands of the captive and set the prisoners free. A missionary has been sent to us, and Tararo has embraced the Christian religion! The people are even now burning their gods of wood!" (CI 274). Good triumphs over evil, Christianity and civilized living provide a solution to all the problems of mankind. Villages converted to Christianity become prosperous overnight: "what a proof that Christianity is of God!" (CI 238). Not that there is no Original Sin, as some critics would have us believe, [9] for how can this be true when Jack says that the atrocities he relates are as "true as that accursed sin which has rendered the human heart capable of such diabolical enormities!" (CI 204), but that though man is fallen he can be redeemed — Earthly Paradise is possible. Even "Bloody Bill" is redeemable if only he believes. So if Ballantyne's picture of Western man, and of Man in general through the mediation of Western man, is optimistic, it is in the sense that Civilization and Religion are posited as effective controls to his fallen (beastly) nature. The novel itself heaves its last breath in the form of a prayer for more evangelists: "We, who live in the islands of the sea, know that the true Christians always act thus. Their religion is one of love and kindness. We thank God that so many Christians have been sent here — we hope many more will come" (CI 276-77). Christianity being thus the way of life for the civilized and the saved, it is clear that Ballantyne has combined the "evangelical" and "imperialist" myths in his novel.

Conversion to Christianity amounts to an unqualified adoption of British life-style (jackets, suits and all) as well as a "British" form of government, all of these changes being based on the premise of the superiority of Western civilization. The consequences of this conjuncture are far-reaching. Christianity or, shall we say, the evangelical ethic, justifies and guarantees imperial expansion. It also promotes exploitative trade. First of all it is a potent force of pacification, 'an opium of the people' which makes the natives more indulgent in their relationship with the merchants. Which is why the bloodthirsty pirate is interested in the

[9] See, Tiger 49.

gospel: "the only place among the southern islands where a ship can put in and get what she wants in comfort, is where the gospel has been sent to" (CI 175). It equally creates new desires (naturalized of course) among the new converts, which make Western goods very much in demand thus securing the 'survival' of the Western economic system. This situation establishes a sort of complicity between the missionaries, the exponents of colonialism and the capitalists. It is in this sense that the boys in *Coral Island* do embody at once the 'Evangelical' and 'Imperialist' myths. With the help of God they convert in the most unrealistic manner vast numbers of savages who logically become overtly subservient British subjects.

Ballantyne's story thus enshrines in fictional form aspects of the Crusoe myth as it evolved during the nineteenth century: the primitivist myth or the myth of Earthly Paradise, a paradise to be found on a desert-island or in society through Christianity; the success-story myth, attesting not only to the ingenuity, rationalism and virtue of the British child (and by extrapolation of Victorian man), but above all to the superiority of Western Civilization. Here again we find the idealization of "use-value" and the sanctification of colonialism and capitalism. But above all we have a general optimistic view of man so characteristic of the Victorian age. It should, however, be borne in mind that although even the savages are perfectible, this is primarily a myth of Western man and his civilization; and the others are seen only in light of their responses to those on whom their salvation (both spiritual and economic) depends.

In spite of all these ideological parallels between Ballantyne's story and the premises underlying the Robinson Crusoe myth, something interesting is taking place here. We have seen the process involved in the metamorphosis of a story into a myth in terms of textual deformation, conscious and unconscious censorship, but now we see the reverse operation — the fictional embodiment of a myth. This dialectical phenomenon is characteristic of the nineteenth century whose dominant ideologies inspire the myth and which is thus marked by

the proliferation of *Robinsonades* which perpetuate the myth while contributing to its evolution. But while a myth can embody disparate and sometimes contradictory ideologies, a novel, especially in the Victorian context, is not only bound to present a logical, coherent pattern of life, it should also be 'realistic' or, to be more precise, 'life-like.' The 'editor' of Robinson Crusoe believes the story to be "a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it. . ." (RC 1). "Oh reader, this is no fiction," exclaims the narrator of *Coral Island* to gain the reader's confidence (CI 203). An examination of the 'realism' of Defoe's and Ballantyne's novels goes beyond the limits of this study. Nevertheless, since Golding's major argument with Ballantyne's novel is based on considerations of realism, we shall attempt in the next chapter to examine closely these objections which, in effect, are at the origin of Golding's own reworking of this fundamental myth of Western man.

CHAPTER TWO

LORD OF THE FLIES: GOLDING'S RECASTING OF *CORAL ISLAND*

> Islands have always and for a good reason bulked large in the British consciousness. But I was tired of these islands with their paper-cutout goodies and baddies and everything for the best in the best of all possible worlds. I said to my wife, "Wouldn't it be a good idea if I wrote a story about boys on an island and let them behave the way they really would?"[79]

As we have seen in our first chapter, the Robinson Crusoe myth presents a very optimistic view of Western man in particular and, through him, of man in general. The aspects of the myth so far discussed are predicated on the essential goodness of man's nature, on man's ability to influence and change his destiny, as well as to face up to the challenges of existence. The sombre realities of the human condition, the unsavoury facts of human society and history are not ignored, but man's faith in human progress, in his ability to face up to these challenges in his search for an Earthly paradise, is held to be equally real. The negative characteristics of industrial society — isolation, alienation, exploitation and class struggle — are there only to inspire the imagination of reformers like Rousseau and Marx. Such faith in human progress through socio-political reorganization and reform and invention as that expressed by Rousseau and Marx is based of course on the belief that if man is not essentially good, at least he is perfectible. But is non-Western man also perfectible? How does he fit into this picture?

It is interesting to recall that Rousseau, the prophet of the natural man, the 'bon sauvage,' sees his ideal embodied by Robinson Crusoe (a civilized man) and not by Friday, who is the 'natural' natural man. What takes place, in effect, is an exchange of robes, that is if Friday had any robes to exchange. Crusoe metaphorically bequeaths his garments of civilization to Friday, who supposedly becomes the better for it, while Crusoe is crowned with

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[79]William Golding, *A Moving Target* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1982) 163

the laurels of the noble savage. The explanation for this apparent paradox is simple. As we already know, Crusoe is essentially a Western myth and 'the others,' although they are supposed to become materially and spiritually fulfilled through their assimilation of the values of the West, are in reality only instruments for the realization of Western man's cherished aspirations: imperialistic expansion, economic gain, cultural hegemony, or simply 'bonne sauvagerie.' Friday supposedly becomes a better man as a result of adopting the Western values taught to him by Crusoe the evangelist. Similarly, the savage societies of the Pacific islands become immediately prosperous and happy, as well as saved, through their acceptance of Christianity and its attendant European values. A general conclusion that can be reached is that the evil of which man is capable, those things which are wrong with his society, do not emanate from man himself, but are only external challenges to be faced. If man is not perfect, at least he can be perfected. It is this general optimism that can be distilled from our preceding discussions. And, as William Nelson observes, it is this same optimism that the "boy-hero" reflects in *Coral Island*:

> The boy-hero reflected the eighteenth century optimistic view of human nature — a view which has several facets. The first is the concept of the perfectibility of man, which includes the idea that evil is not inherent in man's nature, but stems from the society which forms him. Another corollary idea is that of the noble savage. If man is by nature good, then it would seem that where he is found closest to the natural state he is at his most noble. Human beings in childhood or in a state of nature therefore presumably come closest to the ideal.[71]

Also implicit is a belief in the perfectibility of social man himself, a belief that, in Golding's words, "a correct structure of society would produce goodwill; and that therefore you could remove all social ills by a reorganization of society," whether on communistic grounds or along Western democratic principles. It is this general optimistic view of man that Golding objects to.

For Golding, this belief presupposes that man does not have in him "the sad fact of his cruelty and lust." Golding expresses his discomfort with this optimism in the following

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[71]William Nelson, Introduction, *William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies': A source book* (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960) ix.

terms:

> When these capacities emerged into action they were thought aberrant. Social systems, political systems were composed, detached from the real nature of man. They were what one might call political symphonies, they would perfect most men, and at the least reduce aberrance.
>
> Why, then, have they never worked? How did the idealist concepts of primitive socialism turn at last to Stalinism? How could the political and philosophical idealism of Germany produce as its ultimate fruit the rule of Adolf Hitler?"[72]

The thesis of *Lord of the Flies* becomes apparent: the defects of society could be traced back to the defects in man's nature. In order to illustrate this thesis, Golding adopts the literary convention of castaway boys, but, unlike Ballantyne, he does so in order to show that the shape of the society the boys will evolve is determined neither by orthodox rationalism or the Christian principle of love, nor by rational democratic ideals, but by "their diseased, their fallen nature."[73] He thereby sets out to prove that the shape of society depends on the ethical nature of the individuals who constitute it and not any political system however apparently logical or respectable. *Lord of the Flies* is thus construed as an experiment. It is therefore proper to examine some of its specimens and controls, to see their satiric import regarding the ideological assumptions underlying Ballantyne's morality and, by extension, some of the premises of the myth.

The choice of children as characters is significant. Certainly, if Golding is to prove that the defects of society emanate from man's evil nature, then his guinea pigs should be as close as possible to an image of raw humanity, which, isolated under certain conditions, would behave so as to prove or disprove Golding's point. The choice of characters is thus crucial. According to Paulette Michel-Michot, if "Golding chooses a community of children to work out his theme, the core of the problem is the nature of man, for he contains the seed of evil that will lead him to ruin . . ."[74] It is in a similar light that Philippa Moody observes that the "children, if not precisely 'innocent', are at least not formed in the pattern of their

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[72]William Golding, *The Hot Gates* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1965) 87.
[73]Golding *The Hot Gates* 88.
[74]Michel-Michot 516.

society with quite the same completeness that adults would be."[75] By choosing children, Golding, in Philip Drew's words, is subscribing to the Romantic fallacy that "to examine the *nature* of a thing, one must examine it in its most primitive forms. This leads him to use immature societies as his symbols of the community of man."[76] I would also add that the age of the protagonists is important as it tends to remove potential sources of psychological frustration and complication — for example, sexual yearning and anxiety about family responsibilities. This age advantage is vaguely alluded to by Ralph, in *Coral Island*: ". . . for we were extremely happy, and Peterkin used to say that as we were very young we should not feel the loss of a year or two" (CI 139). Golding himself says that the boys are "below the age of overt sex, for. . . [he does] not want to complicate the issue with that relative triviality."[77]

The setting is also significant. The children are isolated on an island that promises to be an Earthly Paradise, very much like Crusoe's and that of Ballantyne's boys: "flower and fruit grow together on the same tree . . ." (CI 71). The significance of the setting is further spelled out by Philippa Moody: "They are isolated from the influences of this society in conditions which, partly at least, correspond to their inward sense of the idyllic, and they have all they need, as our first parents did, to support life."[78] The children, at the beginning, indeed see the island as being a good one: "This is our island. It's a good island. Until the grown-ups come to fetch us we'll have fun" (LF 45). Golding himself emphasizes the importance of this fact:

> The boys find an earthly paradise, a world, in fact like our world of boundless wealth, beauty and resource... They did not have to fight for survival, for I did not want a Marxist exegesis. If disaster came, it was not to come through the exploitation of one class by another. It was to rise, simply and solely out of the nature of the brute.[79]

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[75]Moody 51.
[76]Philip Drew, "Second Reading," Nelson 15.
[77]Golding, *The Hot Gates* 89.
[78]Moody 51.
[79]Golding, *The Hot Gates* 89.

Golding, then, places his children on a lush tropical island, with very obvious satirical intentions. The setting also serves a methodological function. Peter Green sees in it the ingenuity of the laboratory technician: "Golding's children, then, are isolated on their desert island for a specific spiritual experiment, much as a scientist might isolate a culture in a petri dish; and their behaviour must be considered in the light of their author's known convictions."[10] The problem with this kind of selection of specimens and controls to prove a thesis already held to be true by the scientist will be discussed later in the chapter.

The results of the experiment are by now well known: the boys, 'in spite of' everything, make a mess of their situation, just as Crusoe, 'in spite of' everything, makes a fabulous success story out of his solitude. In spite of their Rousseauesque natural habitat, the boys do not embody Rousseau's concept of the noble savage, nor is the society they evolve shaped by the rationalistic and religious values which guarantee the success of Ballantyne's boys. At the beginning, however, the boys do not fail to impress the readers and themselves with the same smug complacency as the boys in *Coral Island*: "We're English and the English are best at everything" (LF 55). But instead of behaving as English boys should, civilizing and evangelizing savages — Defoe-Ballantyne style — implementing the whole range of Western standards of living à la Crusoe, they regress into barbaric savagery which, but for the intervention of the naval officer, would apparently have ended with Jack destroying himself after murdering everyone else. A detailed analysis of the process will reveal Golding's critical commentary on *Coral Island*.

We have seen in the first chapter just how easy it is for the boys in *Coral Island* to evolve a functioning social order, by the institution of political authority to which everybody submits without coercion. There are, in fact, no elections, as there is no need for them. Jack's decisions are always respected, as they always, somehow, turn out to be for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The boys are certainly of different temperaments, but these

[10]Green 65.

differences, weaknesses and strengths are complementary and beneficial to the group and its survival. Theirs is an ideal government, as it reflects Western democratic ideals of the time, with the success of the democracy being further guaranteed, in this specific case, by Jack's being a natural leader, a fictional version of Plato's "philosopher-king." In a similar manner, the boys in *Lord of the Flies*, Golding says, "try to construct a civilization on the island."[31] But it is Golding's thesis that the society they evolve will ultimately be shaped by no such constructs of civilization but by their fallen nature. In this respect, the choice of a leader according to democratic principles is the first test of Ballantyne's optimism. Faced with this task, the boys are simply befuddled. Not only are they of disparate temperaments, weaknesses and strengths, as in *Coral Island*, but the potential leaders have a basic incompleteness about them, and their weaknesses, strengths and differences provide a chemistry of analysis rather than synthesis, of disintegration rather than cohesion. There is really no clearly identifiable leader. The reasons for Ralph's election are at best mysterious and obscure:

> None of the boys could have found good reason for this; what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy while the most obvious leader was Jack. But there was a stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out: there was his size, and attractive appearance; and more obscurely, yet most powerfully, there was the conch. The being that had blown that, that had sat waiting for them on the platform with the delicate thing balanced on his knees, was set apart. (LF 30)

Clearly, this election is by no means guided by rational principles. Jack is the obvious leader, but Ralph gives the boys an illusion of power and strength, through his attractive looks, his imposing stature and, above all, through a symbol of strength and authority: the conch. It will not be long before the electorate realizes that, if Ralph had initially given them the illusion of strength necessary to buy their confidence, real strength resides in the "obvious leader," Jack, whose energy, however, will be put to the wrong use. Moreover, as Philippa Moody observes, those same qualities which ensure Ralph's election, prefigure his failure as a leader:

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[31]Golding, *The Hot Gates* 89.

> But the qualities that ensure Ralph's election are exactly those that make him ineffectual as a leader in such circumstances. He is just too civilized. He expects his suggestions to be carried out simply because they are good ones. Whereas Jack, rejoicing in command for its own sake and driven by certain inward animal compulsions, can simply enforce his will; he does not need to be reasonable or to persuade.[82]

Golding has thus deliberately complicated Ballantyne's simple characterization. Jack, the rational and natural leader in *Coral Island*, becomes Jack, the obvious but unelected dissident leader, the embodiment of brute force and barbaric aggression in *Lord of the Flies*. The prevailing image we have of Ballantyne's Jack is that of the philosopher-king: bookish, knowledgeable, ponderous and wise. One might however argue that, far from being the perfect leader showing equanimity of spirit, Jack already bears, if only latently, some of the traits of his namesake in Golding's novel. He is temperamental, compulsive and capable of making the most erratic, foolhardy and dangerous decisions. He is chivalric, and almost quixotic, attributes which, but for the final *deus ex machina*, might have sealed for his juvenile subjects a fate not more enviable than that of the boys in *Lord of the Flies*. This may explain why Golding does not have to give another name to his own aggressive anti-hero, since he simply has to amplify those aggressive and compulsive tendencies suggested in Ballantyne's Jack, but never allowed there to lead to their logical end: the death of the boys in barbaric captivity. Moreover, Jack in *Lord of the Flies* is presented less as a willful criminal than as a boy acting under the compulsive promptings of the beast embedded in his soul. While Jack acknowledges the importance of rules, he is not naïve enough to believe that such rules will be obeyed simply because they are good, without the proper police force to enforce them — an agency that even the adult democratic model cannot do without. "What if someone decides not to obey?" is Jack's unanswered question. Golding is opposed thus to the 'paper-cutout goodies and baddies' who inhabit British fictional islands, who make for the happy ending the author intends — a 'jolly good show' sort of morality. That the qualities of

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[82]Moody 16-17

leadership are not readily and completely recognizable in any of the potential leaders in *Lord of the Flies* (not even in Jack, the most obvious leader) is a critical commentary on Ballantyne's simplistic and almost manichean characterization.

In the castaway survival arrangement, the question of leadership and authority is closely related to the problem of the definition of needs and priorities. Rousseau and Marx have, in their various ways, theorized about Crusoe's utilitarian cult. *Coral Island*, too, embodies a certain utilitarian ethic. Golding implicitly raises questions about this ideology similar to Jean Baudrillard's. In *Coral Island*, needs are defined very much in terms of what is usable and what is superfluous, and therefore wasteful. The boys do not subscribe to Crusoe's ethic of accumulation, and they see utilitarianism in a moral rather than in a pragmatic light. Peterkin's hunting sprees would not necessarily have militated against the possibilities of a rescue. Nor are pork and sport mutually exclusive ends; they represent desires which can be gratified together. That is why the boys see no contradiction between their utilitarianism, their building of a bower, and their desire for meat, as long as the bower and the meat are actually used. This also explains why Peterkin's hunting expeditions are restricted to a precise end — pork (a need naturalized by culture) — and are not, as Peterkin would like them to be, and as Jack in *Lord of the Flies* makes them, an end in themselves. It is a rational imperative, the allegiance to rules, the submission to the public will, that contains Peterkin's animal spirits.

The situation in *Lord of the Flies* is infinitely more complex. The tending of the rescue fire and pig hunting have become mutually exclusive activities; it is either smoke or pigs, rescue or fun. Ralph sees this dilemma: "We want to have fun. And we want to be rescued" (LF 48). For Ralph, the choice is clear, but it is not so clear for the little ones. He makes his rules and defines his priorities, but the very fact that rules are needed to define what Ralph and the others call 'needs' satirizes in a subtle but effective way the very concept of needs. If the needs of these boys in this idyllic state of nature were really natural needs,

they would be so natural and immediately recognizable as to need no legislation. It is precisely the failure to elaborate a unanimously accepted and implemented system of needs that is at the origin of the disintegration of the community. Moreover, Ralph's fatal and paradoxical delegation to Jack's group of the task of tending the rescue-fire along with that of hunting, a sport so irresistibly engaging to Jack, raises serious questions about his ability to make the right decisions — the rational ones. Jack and Peterkin in *Coral Island* certainly have their moments of disagreement, but with their spirit of tolerance and love they always make up again. In Golding's novel, however, Ralph cannot forgive Jack's dereliction of duty, though the latter apologizes. Ralph, for all his humanism, is weak, and the small boys cannot help muttering their disapproval of his intolerance.

The inability to establish effective leadership on rational principles ultimately leads to the fragmentation of the community. Jack's meeting with Ralph after the act of neglect is climactic and offers a metaphor for the disintegration of the community: "The two boys faced each other. There was the brilliant world of hunting, tactics, fierce exhilaration, skill; and there was the world of longing and baffled commonsense" (LF 89). In this case, the world of the hunt proves to be infinitely more attractive than that of guarding the fire, the world of common sense. Philip Drew sees Golding exploring here "the problem of how to maintain moderate liberal values and to pursue distant ends against pressure from extremists and against the lower instincts."[13] With Jack's failure to do his duty, the community becomes polarized in terms of the forces of reason and common sense on the one hand and the more powerful lower instincts on the other, between restraint and abandon, democratic ideals and the law of the jungle. The shape of the society as it evolves, as Golding would have it, is determined neither by Rousseau's ideal of the noble savage nor by the rational dictates of civilization, but by the irrational powers itching within the boys' being: the illness of being human — the beast within them.

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[13]Drew 11.

What sort of statement is Golding making, then, about Western democratic ideals, including Rousseau's concept of the public will? Thomas Coskren's observations are worth considering here:

> William Golding's novel is not anti-human; it is anti-Rousseau. It does not portray human nature as such, it presents human nature as infected with the romantic chimera of inevitable human progress, a progress which will be achieved because of the innate nobility and innocence of the human species.[14]

It is certainly true that, since true natural man is inconceivable, as even a day-old baby is influenced by the tastes and sensibilities of its "parents'" culture, one cannot seriously talk of quintessential human nature. Coskren's notion of the romantic chimera tallies with Golding's definition of the innocence of his juvenile characters:

> They're innocent of their own natures. They don't understand their own natures and therefore, when they get to this island, they can look forward to a bright future because they don't understand the things that threaten it.[15]

It is this naïvety that Coskren calls the romantic chimera of inevitable human progress, one that is so well illustrated in *Coral Island*. Coskren evokes Golding's uneasiness with this myth:

> If, as the Western world seems to believe, the democratic process of government is the best devised by man throughout his history, why doesn't it work always and everywhere? It is at this level that Golding suggests symbolically the inadequacy . . . of the solely human; it is at this level that he directs his devastatingly ironic commentary on the Rousseauvian myth of the general will and its unproved presuppositions of the natural goodness of the human species.[16]

Golding deliberately isolates his boys in an earthly paradise, the ideal habitat for Rousseau's noble savage. The boys do not pervert this state of nature into a civilized state as does Crusoe to maintain the complex socio-economic world he has left; they desecrate and transform it into a Hobbesian jungle, because they bring with them the awful illness of being human. This outcome provides an ironic commentary on the concept of the noble savage as well as on the attendant ideology of inevitable human progress through democratic ideas. In Coskren's

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[14]Thomas Marcellus Coskren, "Is Golding Calvinistic?", ed. James R. Baker and Arthur Ziegler, Jr., *William Golding's* Lord of the Flies: *Text, Notes and Criticism* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1954) 253.
[15]James Keating, "Interview with William Golding," Baker 191.
[16]Coskren 256.

words,

> . . . *Lord of the Flies* takes man back to the primitive condition of things, which the French social reformer had advocated as the one sure way of restoring man to his proper dignity. Then it shows that, far from being naturally good, man has some type of defect for which civilization is not responsible. Rousseau's social philosophy fails the test, and the essentially confused notion of nature which Rousseau bequeathed to the contemporary world is exposed for the fraud it is.[17]

One might therefore say that *Lord of the Flies* loosely corresponds to Reckwitz's definition of the third category of modern negative "Robinsonades" which

> . . . examine what happens when, although external conditions are ideal, the castaways themselves are lacking what is required to survive as civilized human beings. In cases like these everything seems to go right at the beginning, and the castaways seem to be in full command of themselves and their situation. Then they start organizing things, in the course of which the whole range of European concepts is implemented. Soon it becomes obvious, however, that the anthropological and cultural premises of the intended survival-arrangement have never been valid.[18]

Hence, instead of having another success story, we have regression and disaster. It is by analysing this process that we will grasp more fully Golding's reaction to the rationalist myth, the concepts of the innocence of the child (and by extension of man) and of human perfectibility.

Claire Rosenfield, who reads Freudian theory into *Lord of the Flies*, sees the motif of games at the origin of the process:

> The games of the beginning have a double function: they, first of all, reflect the child's attitude toward play as a temporary cessation from the activities imposed by the adult world; but like the games played before the formation of civilization, they anticipate the ritual which reveals a developing society. So the children move from voluntary play to ritual, from "only pretending" to reality, from representation to identification. The older strictures imposed by parents are soon forgotten . . .[19]

How does play become ritual in this novel? The motif of fear is central to this discussion. The orthodox rationalism that pervades *Coral Island* has no place for the human element of fear. There is a strong denial of the mysterious, the unexplainable, the ghostly. There are no beasts or ghosts to be feared. Such an attitude would seem to correspond more to the intrepidity

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[17]Coskren 256.
[18]Reckwitz 647-48.
[19]Claire Rosenfield, "Men of a Smaller Growth: A Psychological Analysis of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*", Nelson 124.

embodied in Crusoe the myth, than to Defoe's Crusoe who, upon the discovery of footprints on the island, imposes upon himself a prolonged period of confinement (out of fear). Naturally, the myth censors this aspect, which would have made Crusoe's story less spectacularly brilliant. In *Coral Island*, the boys are always excited by the prospects of explaining away any apparently mysterious and normally frightening phenomenon. Virginia Tiger sees the element of fear as a distinguishing factor between Ballantyne's and Golding's morality: "Golding's boys of course do grow frightened of the unknown. In fact, it is just the fear of a beast — and its ambiguous existence on the island — which forms the dramatic and symbolic core of *Lord of the Flies*."[90]

The fate of the children's community ultimately comes to be hinged on the children's varied responses to the existence of a beast on an island that was once thought to be a paradise. The reaction of Piggy, who, as Moody observes, never really leaves the world of *Coral Island*, is reminiscent of the solid rationalism of Ballantyne's novel. He has no room for "disastrous exceptions, no areas of undiscovered darkness."[91] He recalls the perfectly scientific adult world:

> "We know what goes on and if there's something wrong, there's someone to put it right."
>
> "You have doctors for everything, even the inside of your mind. You don't really mean that we got to be frightened all the time for nothing? Life" said Piggy expansively, "is scientific, that's what it is." (LF 104-05)

The problem is that nobody is willing to buy the asthmatic and funny-looking Piggy's reassuring rationalism. Ralph's response is commonsensical — they should retreat to the other end of the island to avoid the beast. Such a response only strengthens the boys' belief in the reality of the beast and, as a consequence, promotes their fear rather than assuages it. It is Jack's response that gains the endorsement of the children. He at once denies the existence of the beast and affirms his ability to destroy it. Philippa Moody observes that, "in a curious

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[90]Tiger 51.
[91]Moody 20.

way, . . . [he] half seems to hope in his primitive soul that a beast may exist, and it is easy for him to discover incarnations for it. . . In some ways, it is useful to him; he employs it as an instrument of his dark authority."[9] This may well be the case, but there is a more practical, strategic reason for this. Jack has to promote the boys' fear by accepting that there may be a beast. But his ability to hunt and kill the beast provides an immediate justification for the hunt, this time, not only of pigs (Jack's obsession) — which might be considered unnecessary and detrimental to the group's rescue — but also of the beast, the fear of which, once instilled in the group, makes its hunting one of the 'necessities' for the group's survival. Not only does this justify and 'naturalize' the hunt, it also makes of Jack a stronger and more reliable protective force for the boys. Of course, the children's attraction to Jack is also due to the thrill and to the liberating effects of the hunt as well as to its practical product — pork. Let us remember that some of the children fall ill from malnutrition because of a vegetarian diet they are not used to.

The next important question concerns the identity of the beast. In *Coral Island* and, to some extent, in *Robinson Crusoe*, the major source of danger is savages — both black and white in *Coral Island* — who are often referred to as beasts. The triumvirate in *Coral Island* is temporarily broken when Ralph is taken away by the pirates, and the three boys are later imprisoned by the black savages. Hence, the forces that threaten the unity and survival of the group are objective and identifiable; they can be related to in physical terms; they can be conquered and subdued (which they finally *are*, with the help of God). Justice is established, violence eradicated and prosperity guaranteed. The solution to the problems of mankind is thus reduced to the simple matter of accepting the values of Western civilization. Human perfectibility, says Jack, is a reality: ". . . by religion a man may attain a great degree of it" (CI 63). On Golding's island, however, there are no indigenous savages and there is no objective report of a beast. Yet the reality of the beast is so powerful that its identification

[9]Moody 19.

becomes the major preoccupation of the boys and, indeed, of the readers. This search leads us finally to the tragic awareness that the hunted is not external to the hunter; the beast which is at the root of social erosion is engrained in the very soul of the boys. Seen in this light, the hunt finally becomes an act of self-destruction. Let us turn now to the process that leads Simon, Ralph and the reader to the horrible awareness that the beast is man himself and, in the process, we shall see how pig-hunt becomes man-hunt.

It is the smallest boys who are first aware of and report the presence of a "beastie" on the island. But, for them, it is a snake, not a pig. That beast is eventually synonymous with pig needs very little explanation; it is part of Jack's strategy. But, were it really a pig, the boys would not be so terrified. Yet the beast-hunt is actually seen as a pig-hunt. Claire Rosenfield's analysis of the transformations of the beast's identity is, in this respect, interesting. After the first kill, she comments:

> Jack is still revelling in the knowledge that he has "outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taken away its life like a long and satisfying drink" . . . Already he has begun to obliterate the distinctions between animals and men, as do primitives; already he thinks in terms of the metaphor of a ritual drinking of blood, the efficacy of which depended on the drinker's assumption of his victim's strength and spirit."

The blood-drinking here establishes an identification between the beast and Jack. Jack literally disguises himself as a pig on his hunting trips. After the hunt, the boys theatrically re-enact the killing of the pig, with Maurice playing the role of the latter — the beast. Rosenfield has this to say concerning these performances:

> At this dramatic representation each child is still aware that this is a display, a performance. He is never "so beside himself that he loses consciousness of ordinary reality." Each time they reenact the same event, however, their behaviour becomes more frenzied, more cruel, less like representation than identification. The chant then becomes "'Kill the beast. Cut his throat.' 'Spill his blood.'" It is as if the first event, the pig's death, is forgotten in the recesses of time; a new myth defines the primal act. Real pig becomes mythical beast."

In my opinion, the association between pig and beast is established much earlier. One might

"Rosenfield 126.
"Rosenfield 126.

say that, much as the protagonist in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* comes finally to be designated by the pronoun "it", here the beast is gradually humanized — it is referred to as "him" — while the boys are gradually dehumanized, becoming more and more bestial. The metamorphoses lead to the final merging of the two elements. As Claire Rosenfield observes, Jack "appears almost dehumanized, his 'nose only a few inches from the humid earth.' He is 'dog-like' and proceeds forward 'on all fours' 'into the semi-darkness of the undergrowth.'"[95] We are thus prepared for what finally happens when Simon, coming to share the knowledge with the others that the beast is only them, is himself ironically taken for the beast and brutally killed. This act apparently marks the transition from pig-hunt to man-hunt. But in reality, the transition is simply a realization; the distinction between pig, beast, and man has always been very blurred; the murder of Simon is only the logical conclusion of a process started with the disintegration of the community into two factions. But for the timely intervention of the naval officer, Jack would probably have hunted down and destroyed himself after murdering everyone else. For the truth is that the beast is in them all and especially in him.

Is there, then, any hope? Asked by James Keating whether "there are societies that will enhance the possibility of man becoming good"[96] Golding registers his skepticism in the following words:

> . . . the democratic way is the way in which to move; equally, it seems to me that a democracy has inherent weaknesses in it. . . You can't give people freedom without weakening society as an implement of war. . . It's not a question with me as to whether democracy is the right way so much, as to whether democracy can survive and remain what it is. . ."[97]

The democratic experiment on the island fails partly because it lacks the police machinery which has turned many societies built on democratic ideals into totalitarian states. In view of man's predilection for greed, aggression and violence, checks are indispensable but, as Golding points out in another interview, such checks are "nothing but the fruit of bitter

[95]Rosenfield 126.
[96]Keating 189.
[97]Keating 190.

experience of people who are adult enough to realize 'Well, I, I myself am vicious and would like to kill that man, and he is vicious and would like to kill me, and therefore, it is sensible that we should both have an arbitrary scheme of things in which three other people come in and separate us.'"[99] Clearly, this is far from being Rousseau's concept of the ideal state.

Lord of the Flies bears witness to this need for checks and deterrents. Ralph's rules are ineffectual, but the rules, taboos and prohibitions of the adult world help in restraining the boys, if only provisionally, in the first phase of the novel. Jack cannot stab the first pig he encounters "because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh; because of the unbearable blood" (LF 41). We are told, too, of Roger, who cannot sum up courage to throw stones at a smaller boy: "Yet there was a space round Henry, perhaps six yards in diameter, into which he dare not throw. Here, invisible but strong, was the taboo of the old life. Round the squatting child was the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law" (LF 78). Time and time again, the reader is reminded that adults would do better. Ralph painfully recalls those golden days when "[M]ummy had still been with them, and Daddy had come home everyday, where everything was good-humoured and friendly" (LF 139). And it is finally a naval officer who prevents the novel from ending in a nightmare too horrible to imagine.

All this may lead one to believe that *Lord of the Flies* is only about "castaway children assuming adult responsibilities without adult supervision."[99] This is the kind of interpretation that Carl Niemeyer proposes: "[F]or civilization defeats the beast. It slinks back into the jungle as the boys creep out to be rescued; but the beast is real. It is there, and it may return."[100] These remarks imply that there would never have been the fear of a beast had the boys abided by the values of Civilization — those of the adult world. But this interpretation 'à la Piggy' is inconsistent with Golding's general thesis, which seeks to expose

[99]Frank Kermode, "The Meaning of it All," Baker 201.
[99]Carl Niemeyer, "Coral Island Revisited", Nelson 241.
[100]Niemeyer 245.

the beast *in* man, not out there in the jungle. Golding's novel, unlike Ballantyne's, is no celebration of the vitality of Western civilization, with its implicit belief in human perfectibility:

> Before the Second World War I believed in the perfectibility of social man; that a correct structure of society would produce goodwill; and that therefore you could remove all social ills by a reorganization of society. It is possible that today I believe something of the same again; but after the war I did not because I was unable to... I am thinking of the vileness beyond all words that went on, year after year, in the totalitarian states. . . They [ineffable things] were not done by the head hunters of New Guinea, or by some tribes in the Amazon. They were done, skilfully, coldly by educated men, doctors, lawyers, by men with a tradition of civilization behind them, to beings of their own kind.[101]

Virginia Tiger analyses the techniques deployed by Golding to bring out this moral and to preempt such interpretations as Niemeyer's. She calls these techniques the "ideographic structure" of the novel. She admits that the narrative can easily delude the unwitting reader: "[A]s the narrative progresses the reader is lulled into the unguarded belief that adults may save the situation. . ."[102] But this point of view, as she further explains, is just part of the ideographic structure:

> In *Lord of the Flies* the ideographic structure consists in two movements; in the first, the story is seen from the point of view of the childish protagonist, Ralph, as he grows more and more aware of the island's disintegration. In the second movement, the coda which concludes the fable, we see events from a new point of view, that of the naval officer who is completely unaware and largely indifferent to the suffering.[103]

This is to say that the naval officer — as a representative of the adult world — exhibits the inadequacies of that world in his arrogant ignorance of the human condition.

In this regard the initial point of view held by Ralph and Piggy as to the rationality of the adult world and the vitality of civilization in general is reversed by such symbols as the dead parachutist — a symbol of "man's inhumanity to man; a legacy of barbarism in both ancient and contemporary civilization."[104] It is Ralph who, overawed by impending doom, appeals desperately to the adult world for a sign of hope, and the dead parachutist is the sign

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[101]Golding, *The Hot Gates* 86-87.
[102]Tiger 52.
[103]Tiger 52.
[104]Tiger 52.

that he gets. Golding himself, in his interview with Frank Kermode, throws more light on this symbolism:

> And if you turn round to your parents and say "please help me," they are part of the old structure, the old system, the old world, which ought to be good but at the moment is making the world and the air more and more radioactive.[105]

Hence, according to Virginia Tiger, the grotesque pomposity of the naval officer, who seems to have sailed "straight from the pages of *Coral Island*,"[106] is powerfully ironic, especially if one recalls that it is an adult war that necessitates the shuttling of the boys away from radioactive civilization. The implications of Tiger's argument are interesting: the experiment on the island has its counterpart in the outside world; hence the island is simply a painful microcosm of the adult world. The novel ends in a cul de sac. We are made painfully aware that Rousseau's concept of life in nature is just an intellectual construct. Likewise the idea that civilization is capable of curbing man's inclinations to violence comes under very serious scrutiny. *Lord of the Flies* finally attempts to correct many conceptions about Western man in particular and man in general, his nature and his civilization. William Nelson summarizes this satirical scope:

> Golding has been quoted as saying of *Lord of the Flies*, that his purpose "is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature." The book, therefore, goes against the prevailing view of human nature since the time of the Enlightenment and instead expresses a view comparable to the Christian view of "original sin" and, in another realm of discourse, not incompatible with many recent insights of anthropology and psychology.[107]

Before we draw a conclusion, it is essential that we recall briefly Golding's central objection to Ballantyne. Golding's novel is intended to be "a realistic view of the Ballantyne situation."[108] In what sense, then, is *Lord of the Flies* more realistic than *Coral Island*? By realistic, it would seem that Golding means: corresponding to the reality of the human condition. In his view, the optimistic, cheerful and all-flattering image of man that Ballantyne

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[105]Kermode, "The Meaning of It All" 198.
[106]Tiger 53.
[107]Nelson x.
[108]Kermode, "The Meaning of It All" 201.

presents is inconsistent with the facts of human history and society. He seeks to disprove Ballantyne's morality by conducting "an experiment, allowing a class of children as much freedom as possible and only [intervening] when there seemed to be some possibility of murder being committed."[109] Murder, however, certainly is committed in the novel. Moreover, it is impossible to take this claim of authorial neutrality seriously. First of all, the boys are neither real nor free, as they are figments of the author's imagination. He selects the characters in such a way that the chemistry of their interaction produces exactly the results that he anticipates. The catastrophe takes place partly because of the incompleteness of the central characters. To use Philip Drew's words, ". . . the catastrophe occurs because the qualities of intelligence, address, bravery, decency, organization and insight are divided among Piggy, Jack, Ralph and Simon. Each of them lacks some total vital gift: none of them is a complete person."[110] Yet, Golding expects the results of his experiment to be given a universal significance. He expects his readers to draw valid conclusions of a universal character from the adventures and shortcomings of his boys on their tiny island. Margaret Walters addresses this specific problem. Her objections are forceful and demand a close examination. She raises a crucial issue:

> But as we grasp Golding's general thesis we must also ask how fully the story embodies it and how far it remains an abstract intention; and even whether it does not induce in Golding a too narrow, too reflective grasp of life.[111]

There is the central analogical situation — on the one hand, man *sub specie aeternitatis*, and, on the other, the children on their tiny island. It is doubtful, Walter says, whether this "deliberate narrowing of range really does enable him to concentrate, to distil the essence of a much broader range of experience; or whether, instead, his success depends on excluding most of the complexities of actual life."[112] In other words, how seriously can we take the juvenile

[109]Golding, *A Moving Target* 183.
[110]Drew 13.
[111]Margaret Walters, "Two Fabulists: Golding and Camus", Nelson 98.
[112]Walters 97.

community on the island not only as a metaphor of universal human society, but also as representative of man of all times? As I have indicated, Golding's guinea pigs are free only within his preconceptions and within the limits imposed by his anticipated results. This explains Golding's tendency, in spite of his claims of non-meddling, to sacrifice plot to thesis, to intervene in the story to comment and give a meaning to events that may not otherwise spring from them. Walters cites the specific example of Simon as Golding's mouthpiece:

> Indeed, the figure of Simon is constantly weakened by Golding's attempt to endow him with a mysterious authority and insight, and by his obtrusive stress on the boy's role as some kind of saviour — a stress necessary because the figure, on the dramatic level, is neither plausible nor representative. All this seems to spring from Golding's attempt to give the situation a universal relevance that it fails, at some points, to achieve in itself, an attempt to gloss over the places where the analogue is limited in scope and doesn't correspond to the varied possibilities of human experience.[113]

These observations are in themselves quite solid, but when Walters sees them as part of the perpetual danger of the fabulist, the "temptation to pass off a partial interpretation of experience as the whole truth,"[114] then it becomes apparent that they should be taken as a general critique of the literary convention that Golding deploys.

Golding himself is aware of the limitations of the fable, as well as of the complexity of his design: ". . . if one takes the whole of the human condition as background of a fable it becomes hopelessly complex. . ."[115] Taken under imaginative consideration, Golding writes, the fable "does not become more real than the real world, it shoves the real world on one side. The author becomes a spectator, appalled or delighted, but a spectator. At this moment, how can he be sure that he is keeping a relationship between the fable and the moralized world when he is only conscious of one of them?"[116] The fable, then, especially one such as his, makes heavy, perhaps too heavy, demands on the imagination of the reader. To a fabulist, who is essentially a moralist, the thesis, the moral, is more important than the plot.

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[113]Walters 100.
[114]Walters 100.
[115]Golding, *The Hot Gates* 90.
[116]Golding, *The Hot Gates* 89.

By the nature of his craft, "the fabulist is didactic, desires to inculcate a moral lesson"[117] and is, in the process of doing so, always overstating his case, "because he has a point he wishes to drive home."[118] This would go some way towards explaining Golding's obtrusiveness, if only after the fact. In *A Moving Target*, Golding admits that his claim to know the real nature of man better than Ballantyne is "sheer hubris," "an assumption of the divine right of authors." But such hubris is not fortuitous. His image of man is essentially coloured by the sombre ashes of the Second World War. His stance in *Lord of the Flies* is more a cry for help than a closely argued intellectual position:

> The years of my life that went into the book were not years of thinking but of feeling, years of wordless brooding that brought me not so much to an opinion as a stance. It was like lamenting the lost childhood of the world. The theme defeats structuralism for it is an emotion. The theme of *Lord of the Flies* is grief, sheer grief, grief, grief, grief, grief.[119]

Ballantyne and Golding are both marked by the aspirations, fears and ideologies of their times. This is reflected in V. S. Pritchett's comments:

> A century without war and with a settled sense of the human personality has produced it [*Coral Island*]. In Richard Hughes' book, we saw the first sign of disintegration: the psychologists have discovered that children are not small fanciful adults, but are a cut-off, savage race. In *The Lord of the Flies* we understand that the children are not cut-off; anthropology, the science of how people live together, not separately, reflects the concern of the modern world which has seen its communities destroyed.[120]

Another commentator, Peter Green, has this to say regarding *Coral Island*:

> It was published exactly a century ago, in 1858, at the high tide of Victorian self-confidence, and is permeated with smug national complacency, synthetic missionary fervour, and a kind of paralysing condescension which could only blossom in a safe, stable, unreflecting society.[121]

Moreover, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are marked by a certain humanism, the foundations of which were laid by writers and philosophers such as Locke, Hume and Rousseau, who express a certain faith in the essential goodness of man's nature, a humanism

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[117]Golding, *The Hot Gates* 85.
[118]Keating 192.
[119]Golding, *A Moving Target* 163.
[120]V. S. Pritchett, "Secret Parables", Nelson 37.
[121]Green 174.

that inspired programmes of humanitarian social progress in the nineteenth and even in the twentieth centuries and a belief that man can improve man's condition. This faith in man becomes untenable in face of man's great ability and inclination to destroy himself, as evidenced by the Second World War, which was witnessed at close range by William Golding and Michel Tournier. Even if the war has not exactly changed the nature of man, such violence, aggression and destruction as it unleashed certainly reshaped the sensitivity of the twentieth-century novelist, as well as his conception of his role. E. D. Pendry comments on this shift in the following terms:

> The twentieth century might be termed the Counter-Renaissance, a period in which writers have lost faith in man and his power to work out his own destiny. . . And implicit has been a general recognition of the need for the novelist to (re)appraise the nature of man — the god that failed.[122]

It is against this background that one has to appreciate Golding's pessimism. His programme is probably over-ambitious. But the attempt to reverse certain aspects of the myth, and indeed of other ideological assumptions of Western civilization, cannot be ignored. Ironically, the myth of the noble savage is attacked at the same time as that of the superiority of civilized man. In Michel-Michot's words,

> Golding asks how superior . . . [Western people] are to savages and he points to the superficiality of . . . [their] civilization: . . . it seems to be powerless against the innate brutality of man, against his fear which is in fact an expression of the evil that pervades the world.[123]

The evangelical myth is not directly commented upon, as there are indeed no indigenous savages on the island to be evangelized or civilized. Yet one cannot fail to recall that the group which best embodies the beast in all its aggressiveness and barbaric violence is Jack's: one constituted mostly of British choir boys who apparently never say their prayers. The question of evil is certainly at the centre of Golding's preoccupations, but his approach goes beyond a simple presentation of the forces of good and evil. He takes us to the heart of the

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[122]E. D. Pendry, "William Golding and Mankind's Essential Illness," *Moderna Sprak*, 55.1 (1961) 1.
[123]Michel-Michot 516.

matter, the source of evil itself, exploring evil from a metaphysical point of view. This is one of the reasons why he does not need pirates or strange savage tribes to explore his theme.

Golding's vision of man is pessimistic but it is finally partial, in both senses of the word. In the next chapter we will examine another view of man, that of Michel Tournier. His, as we shall see, is ultimately an optimistic one, but one he builds ironically by pelting brimstone on some of the mythical statues that have been erected to Defoe's Crusoe.

CHAPTER THREE

TOURNIER'S *VENDREDI*: CRUSOE IN THE 1960's

> Pour ma part, je me suis attaché tout particulièrement à un mythe que je crois le plus moderne, le plus actuel, celui dans lequel je pense que les hommes de la fin du vingtième siècle se reconnaissent le mieux: Robinson Crusoé.[124]

Through a rewriting of *Coral Island* — a fictional variant of the Crusoe myth — Golding makes his critical commentary on some of the ideological assumptions underlying the myth. Michel Tournier's *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* is more directly related to Defoe's novel. But, as Madeleine Chapsal puts it, Tournier "ne prend pas le 'Robinson', qui ne sert que d'inspiration et de référence, comme un livre déjà fait, mais comme un mythe toujours à revivre: celui de la solitude au sens fort, c'est à dire de l'homme sans l'homme."[125] This statement does not do justice to the complexity of Tournier's vision, but it indicates the dual nature of his undertaking in writing *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*. For Tournier's interest in Defoe's text is inspired by his interest in the mythical figure that it produces: Robinson Crusoe. A closer look at Tournier's conception of the Crusoe myth will help us to isolate the aspects of Defoe's novel and the ideological strands of the myth that inform Tournier's text.

In Margaret Sankey's words, "Defoe's novel creates a myth from history whereas Tournier's novel uses this myth and the historical structure from its origins in order to comment on history and create a new myth."[126] Tournier explains this process in *Le Vent Paraclet*. Defoe, in Tournier's opinion, essentially profited from the sensationalism created by

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[124]Michel Tournier, Discours de M. Michel Tournier de l'Académie Goncourt, *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Langue et de Littérature Françaises* (Bruxelles) 61 (1978) 314.

[125]Madeleine Chapsal, "Le Robinson du vingtième siècle," *L'Express* 832 (29 mai 1967) 41.

[126]Margaret Sankey, "Meaning through Intertextuality: Isomorphism of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Tournier's *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 18.1 (Jan.-Apr. 1981) 78.

Selkirk's return to England after almost four and a half years of self-willed solitary confinement on the island of Mas a Tierra, in the Pacific. The novelist's modification of the real story suggests to Tournier Defoe's opportunism and his awareness of his society's sensibilities and values. Defoe changes the setting, from Mas a Tierra to an island in the Pacific because "l'auteur visant au succès populaire a préféré cette région du globe peu connue et plus riche en récits que l'archipel Juan Fernandez. . ." (VP 216). The period of isolation has increased — from four years and five months to twenty-eight years: "il faut ce qu'il faut." Moreover, while Selkirk is left on the island because he cannot get along with the captain, Robinson Crusoe finds himself on the island as the only survivor of a shipwreck, circumstances which, in Tournier's opinion, are more edifying: "seul le doigt de Dieu était intervenu dans ce coup du sort" (VP 216).

However, the most significant addition is the invention of the character of Friday, an addition which does nothing to detract from Crusoe's central status, as the novel remains the story of Crusoe and the myth it generates is entirely his. As Tournier points out, it would have been interesting to make of the Crusoe-Friday encounter an ethnographic novel whose subject would be the confrontation of two civilizations, their struggle for dominance, their eventual fusion and the birth of a new civilization from this synthesis. Daniel Defoe does not deal with this subject, because for him Crusoe's is the only civilization. In the eyes of Defoe, Friday is nothing: "une bête, un être en tout cas qui attend de recevoir son humanité de Robinson, l'homme occidental, seul détenteur de tout savoir, de toute sagesse" (VP 227). The idea that Robinson may have something to learn from Friday is inconceivable before the awakening of the ethnographic consciousness of Western man. It is in this light that Tournier sees "la valeur proprement mythologique" of Defoe's story: "Car il est évident que la rencontre Robinson-Vendredi a pris depuis quelques décennies une signification que le cher Defoe était à mille lieues de pouvoir soupçonner" (VP 227). Tournier defines Robinson's attitude to Friday as being racist because, instead of submitting himself to Friday's guiding

hand, as the latter is more likely to possess the knowledge essential for survival in the specific environment, he is obsessed with inculcating in Friday a life-style and values that he brings with him from his native England. It is in this respect that Tournier considers Defoe's novel to be retrospective: "[Il] se borne à décrire la restauration de la civilisation perdue avec les moyens du bord" (VP 229). It is a novel of origins and not of ends. As Gilles Deleuze observes:

> On a souvent remarqué que le thème de Robinson chez Defoe n'était pas seulement une histoire, mais "l'instrument d'une recherche": recherche qui part de l'île déserte et qui prétend reconstituer les origines et l'ordre rigoureux des travaux qui en découlent avec le temps.[117]

As we have seen, Defoe's novel is also about solitude. But loneliness in *Robinson Crusoe* is presented negatively as a challenge, a test to the vitality of Western ingenuity. André Thiel best describes this aspect and explains its popular appeal:

> Le Robinson de Defoe est la projection de l'Angleterre protestante et industrieuse, qui croit dans les valeurs du progrès et de la civilisation. Il s'agissait là d'une sorte d'Odyssée méthodique, à la gloire de l'énergie virile qui transcende la matière et peuple la solitude. L'esprit humain indompté y triomphe de l'adversité et la jeune Angleterre du dix-huitième siècle ne pouvait qu'applaudir aux efforts de cet homme qui à lui seul, défrichait toute une terre, colonisait une île, civilisant les sauvages.[118]

Solitude is a disadvantage, but one that the indomitable human spirit will surmount in glorious fashion. Such an attitude to solitude is no longer compatible with modern sensibilities which are, at best, as we shall see, ambiguous in this respect. "Ce qu'il y a d'épatant dans le personnage de Robinson Crusoe," Tournier writes, "c'est qu'il incarne la solitude (avant de rencontrer Vendredi) dans ce qu'elle a de plus négatif et de plus affreux. A l'époque c'était une malédiction d'échouer sur une île. . ."[119]

We have established in the first chapter that myth-making need not be a conscious endeavour on the part of the novelist. What Tournier demonstrates is that Defoe's novel

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[117]Gilles Deleuze, "Une Théorie d'autrui (autrui, Robinson et le pervers)," *Critique* 241 (juin 1967) 504.
[118]Thiel 97.
[119]Daniel Bougnoux et André Clavel, "Entretien avec M. Tournier," *Silex* 14 (1979) 14.

does, however, contain some of the mythical seeds. In the process of myth-making, the elements in the text are either isolated, distorted and/or inordinately amplified. Rousseau's reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, is not altogether gratuitous when related to aspects already discussed. Although Rousseau provides an idealization of the "noble savage," he fails entirely to offer an enlightened ethnographic exegesis of Defoe's novel. It is Crusoe and Crusoe alone that interests him:

> Seul l'intéresse Robinson, héros industrieux, à la fois sobre et ingénieux, capable de pourvoir lui-même à tous ses besoins sans l'aide de la société. Mais Rousseau ne paraît pas voir que Robinson détruit son île déserte en y reconstruisant un embryon de civilisation. . . (VP 228)

That Rousseau deliberately disregards the presence of Friday is clear, as any other treatment would preclude the idealization of Crusoe as noble savage: ". . . il exclut expressément la présence de Vendredi, début de la société et de l'esclavage" (VP 229). Michel Tournier's novel sets out to be a vindication of Vendredi, a truly Rousseauist novel, as he ironically states in an interview: "Ce n'est plus Robinson qui enseigne Vendredi mais Vendredi qui éduque Robinson."[130] But in practice, it falls short of its goal and Vendredi's novel remains to be written. Tournier apparently did initially mean to write an ethnographic novel, but the novel took its own course and the author settled down to elaborate a completely different theme:

> Mon propos plus proprement philosophique allait dans un sens tout différent. Ce n'était pas le mariage de deux civilisations à un stade donné de leur évolution qui m'intéressait, mais la destruction de toute civilisation chez un homme soumis à l'œuvre décapante d'une solitude inhumaine, la mise à nu des fondements de l'être et de la vie; puis sur cette table rase la création d'un monde nouveau sous forme d'essais, de coups de sonde, de découvertes, d'évidences et d'extases. (VP 229)

It is in this sense that Michel Tournier's novel is prospective and inventive, unlike Defoe's, which is retrospective.

Michel Tournier sets out to renew the Crusoe myth to prevent it from becoming an allegory — a dead myth. What in his opinion is the mythical relevance of Defoe's novel to twentieth-century man? Tournier himself does not fail to raise this central issue:

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[130]"Quand Vendredi éduque Robinson," *Le Monde* 7107 (novembre 1967) 10.

> Il n'est pas inutile de reprendre certains de ces aspects (éléments constitutifs de l'âme de l'homme occidental) qui sont autant de moules romanesques dans lesquels nous donnons forme et profil aux humeurs et aspirations que nous inspire notre commune condition d'hommes du vingtième siècle finissant. (VP 221)

To Michel Tournier, Crusoe is first of all the victim of solitude. He is the orphan of humanity who has to struggle against the demons of solitude: despair, fear of madness and the temptation of suicide. A novel dealing with solitude — "la plaie la plus pernicieuse de l'homme occidental contemporain" (VP 221-22) — cannot fail to interest modern Western man, as man has come to feel more and more isolated, even in the midst of the anonymous and oppressive crowd, as he has become more wealthy and free. Thus it is that, in line with the contradictory nature of the aspirations of modern man, Robinson Crusoe can become the hero of solitude: "Car cette solitude qui nous tue et nous rend fous, par une curieuse inversion des valeurs, se pare à nos yeux de prestiges délicieux, comme ces poissons meurtriers dont l'odeur, le goût et les effets immédiats possèdent un je-ne-sais-quoi d'une irremplaçable séduction" (VP 225). Everybody dreams today of some desert island where he can practice such activities as gardening or tinkering, which Crusoe is imagined to have enjoyed on his island: "On voit ce qui fait le prestige de Robinson: cette solitude dont nous souffrons même et surtout au milieu de la foule anonyme et oppressante, il a su merveilleusement, lui, l'aménager et l'élever au niveau d'un art de vivre. . ." (VP 221). What was before seen in a purely negative light can now be portrayed as having a certain appeal, while not altogether losing its dismal aspect.

The other aspect of the Crusoe story which is of particular interest to Tournier is that of the encounter with Friday. Friday represents the man of the Third World and Crusoe the man from the West — the colonialist — and, in Tournier's opinion, nothing has influenced the destiny of modern Western man more than the consequences of colonisation and decolonisation. The reworking of this aspect of Defoe's vision became necessary: "Car il est évident que la rencontre Robinson-Vendredi a pris depuis quelques décennies une signification

que le cher Daniel Defoe était à cent mille lieues de pouvoir soupçonner" (VP 227). Tournier's interest in ethnography and the revelations that this new subject afforded were such as to require a re-examination of Robinson Crusoe's relationship with Friday. For Tournier the conclusions were inescapable:

> Relisant son roman [celui de Defoe], je ne pouvais en effet oublier mes années d'étude au musée de l'homme. Là, j'avais appris qu'il n'y a pas de "sauvages," mais seulement des hommes relevant d'une civilisation différente de la nôtre et que nous avions grand intérêt à étudier. (VP 227)

With such a background, it was clear that the novel would have to question the myth of the superiority of Western civilization.

An analysis of Tournier's novel shows that Robinson's life on the island can be discussed under two headings: what relates to his period of solitude and what relates to his life after the arrival of Vendredi. The first question is: what will solitude make of the lonely castaway cut off from all intercourse with the outside world or, on the other hand, what can he make of his solitude? Defoe's response is simple: through his ingenuity and perseverance, the individual can without any major problems survive his solitude and achieve something impressive during his period of isolation. Marcel Lobet's observations in this respect are worth noting:

> Deux siècles et demi d'allusions à l'expérience de Robinson ont fini par créer dans notre esprit le mythe de l'individu à l'état pur. Pendant longtemps on n'y a vu que l'aspect moral de "l'opération-survie" réussie par un naufragé ingénieux. Pas de place dans ce récit édifiant pour une angoisse métaphysique ou pour les déductions de la psychanalyse. . . L'exégèse post-freudienne s'est emparée de ce beau tableau clinique: le drame d'un homme isolé à la fois libre et prisonnier. . .[131]

Developments in the area of psychology and psychoanalysis have necessitated the asking of certain basic questions:

> Si Robinson est socialement désengagé, sa liberté est-elle totale? . . . S'il a réalisé le vœu de tous les misanthropes adamites rêvant d'une solitude édénique, a-t-il été heureux? Et quelle fut la vie sexuelle de cet Ulysse britannique privé de Pénélope et sevré des "diversions" de Circé, de Calypso et de Nausicaa?[132]

Defoe has written an impressive success story and, accordingly, Rousseau and Marx, among

[131]Marcel Lobet, *Classiques de l'an 2000* (Paris: Editions de la Francité, 1970) 109.
[132]Lobet 109.

others, idealize Crusoe's isolation as it allows the latter to illustrate, in their opinion, the concepts of the noble savage and of utilitarianism. Michel Tournier proceeds to demonstrate that Robinson, instead of being the natural man, living in harmony with nature, removed from the evils of capitalist exchange with its attendant fetichism of goods, is in fact, in spite of his isolation, an embodiment of civilized man and *homo economicus*. This is the paradox — that of the capitalist ethos in a situation where no exchange is possible — that is at the root of the collapse of Robinson's intricate system. A closer analysis of the different phases of his life on the island will make this clear.

The earliest phase of Robinson's life on the island is the only one that is close to Rousseau's conception of the life of the natural man. He lives as a gatherer of fruit and as a hunter. He does not even build a house. His essential passivity is inspired by his anticipation of imminent rescue and his attitude is dominated by a refusal of the island; all his attention is turned towards the sea; he is a man of the Old World and impatiently awaits salvation. The first commentary on Crusoe's mythical independance of spirit is his hallucination, his sudden vision of the island as some kind of monster:

> Enfin, il lui parut tout à coup que l'île, ses rochers, ses forêts n'étaient que la paupière et le sourcil d'un œil immense, bleu et humide, scrutant les profondeurs du ciel. Cette dernière image l'obséda au point qu'il dut renoncer à son attente contemplative. Il se secoua et décida d'entreprendre quelque chose. Pour la première fois, la peur de perdre l'esprit l'avait effleuré de son aile. Elle ne devait plus le quitter. (VL 23)

The boys in *Coral Island* would be indifferent to such visions, if indeed they were capable of having them. Tournier's Robinson, far from being immune to the effects of isolation, cannot remain indifferent to this early sign and so decides to build a boat, with which to escape. Again, the psychological effects of solitude contribute to the absurd failure of this venture:

> Il lui devenait de plus en plus difficile de songer à plusieurs choses à la fois et même de passer d'un sujet de préoccupation à un autre. Il s'avisa ainsi qu'autrui est pour nous un puissant *facteur de distraction*, non seulement parce qu'il nous dérange sans cesse et nous arrache à notre pensée actuelle, mais aussi, parce que la seule possibilité de sa survenue jette une lueur sur un univers d'objets situés en marge de notre attention, mais capable à tout instant d'en devenir le centre. . . Il [Robinson] était désormais entouré d'objets soumis à la loi sommaire du tout ou

> rien, et c'était ainsi qu'absorbé par la construction de l'Evasion, il avait perdu de vue le problème de sa mise à flot. (VL 36)

Can Robinson survive alone, can he succeed without the help of "autrui"? Like Defoe's Crusoe, he embarks upon the construction of the boat without any consideration of the feasibility of its launching. It is only when he completes his work that the whole project slaps him in the face. The resulting desperation leads him to the mud-hole, an episode predictably absent from Defoe's novel:

> La foule de ses frères, qui l'avaient entretenu dans l'humain sans qu'il s'en rendît compte, s'était brusquement écartée de lui, et il éprouvait qu'il n'avait pas la force de tenir seul sur ses jambes. Il mangeait, le nez au sol, des choses innommables. Il faisait sous lui et manquait rarement de se rouler dans la molle tiédeur de ses propres déjections. Il se déplaçait de moins en moins, et ses brèves évolutions le ramenaient toujours à la souille. (VL 38)

This picture is hardly consonant with Rousseau's conception of the state of nature and his idealization of Crusoe's period of isolation. Anthony Purdy observes that it "is this episode of the mud-hole, which has no equivalent in Defoe, that constitutes Tournier's first ironic commentary on the supposed heroic autonomy of the individual so central to the Crusoe myth."[133] It is, however, clear that this aspect of the myth has already received subtle ironic attention through the terrible hallucinations Robinson has had through his unsuccessful attempt to escape. What Crusoe resolves to do, after another hallucination involving his long-dead sister, Lucy, marks the end of the period when his activities are entirely oriented towards rescue and against the likelihood of a long period of living on the island. Mahomet must now come to the mountain, since the mountain has not come to him.

It has become clear to Crusoe that he cannot maintain his humanity much longer, if he remains cut off from his native civilization. Since, however, his chances of literally getting back to society through rescue are minimal, he must now, in Purdy's words, undertake "a painstaking reconstruction of the civilization he has left behind. . ."[134] This reconstruction serves a major function. Above all, it is a war on the *environment*, an attempt to subjugate

[133]Purdy 225.
[134]Purdy 226.

the island, to humanize it, to recreate it in the image of civilized society, and thereby make it intelligible and manageable. On the other hand, the administration of the island is supposed to stand in place of the "autrui" whom Robinson comes to recognize as being indispensable to his remaining human. This already reveals the nature of his work which, far from being aimed at the satisfaction of his material needs as Marx and to some extent Rousseau would have us believe, is heavy with social and symbolic significance. When it comes to salvaging goods from the wreck, for example, Crusoe's choice of items no longer carries the heavy ambiguity of the utilitarian criteria professed by his ancestor. The salvaging of goods which are quite useless to Defoe's hero has occasioned much polemic among critics. Tournier removes this point of contention by establishing that Crusoe's choice of goods is not determined by narrow utilitarian considerations: "Il ne rejetait rien qui fût transportable, car les objets les moins utilisables gardaient à ses yeux la valeur de reliques de la communauté humaine" (VL 43). His intention is clearly to restore the symbolic community of the society he has left behind.

Crusoe's decision to keep a diary is also significant. Margaret Sankey, who sees Defoe's novel as being generally about man's struggle to subdue nature physically and morally, gives an interesting analysis of the symbolic value of writing: "Writing represents civilization and culture as opposed to the formlessness of the shipwreck on the isle of Despair."[133] Still referring to Defoe's Crusoe, Margaret Sankey proceeds to say that Robinson's reordering of his life on the island through writing parallels his civilizing of Friday and the island itself. This is why, in her opinion, Tournier's Crusoe cannot consistently write his own story:

> Crusoe in *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* cannot write his own story as he has in *Robinson Crusoe* because the culminating point of that story is his progression beyond the use of words into an eternal present. Tournier's use of the third person enables him to represent this fact in a way impossible in the first person.[134]

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[133]Sankey 87.
[134]Sankey 88.

However, Tournier's Robinson does initially resolve to record some aspects of his life on the island and this is part of his programme to reconstruct his social humanity:

> Il se hâta alors de tailler convenablement une plume de vautour, et il pensa pleurer de joie en traçant ses premiers mots sur une feuille de papier. Il lui semblait soudain s'être à demi arraché à l'abîme de bestialité où il avait sombré et faire sa rentrée dans le monde de l'esprit en accomplissant cet acte sacré: écrire. Dès lors il ouvrit presque chaque jour son *log-book* pour consigner, non des événements petits et grands de sa vie matérielle — il n'en avait cure —, mais ses méditations, l'évolution de sa vie intérieure ou encore les souvenirs qui lui revenaient de son passé et les réflexions qu'ils lui inspiraient. (VL 39)

Writing, like many of Robinson's other activities, has a social function.

Although a house, on purely utilitarian grounds, is apparently indispensable to the boys in *Coral Island*, culture has naturalized their need for one. Tournier's Robinson is perfectly aware of the practical uselessness of a house in his circumstances, but he constructs one and explains his reasons for doing so, reasons by now obvious to us:

> Il était sensible à l'inutilité pratique de cette villa, à la fonction capitale mais surtout morale, qu'il lui attribuait. Il décida bientôt de n'y accomplir aucune tâche utilitaire — pas même sa cuisine —, de la décorer avec une patience minutieuse, de n'y dormir que le samedi soir, continuant les autres jours à user d'une sorte de grabat de plumes et de poils dont il avait bourré un enfoncement de la paroi rocheuse de la grotte. (VL 56)

This house, which becomes Robinson's seat of government, prepares us for the period of "l'île administrée." Michel Tournier finds a historical counterpart for this period:

> Nous sommes à l'époque où les puritains anglais envahissent et colonisent, la Bible à la main, les terres vierges du Nouveau Monde. Ils devaient s'inspirer d'une morale de l'accumulation à outrance, codifiée dans les almanachs de Benjamin Franklin qui, partant du Calvinisme, aboutit à la société libérale et capitaliste. (VP 233)

This may be the major significance of the shift in the time of the shipwreck, Defoe's taking place a century earlier than Tournier's. Anthony Purdy defines this "capitalist spirit" as it is described by Max-Weber:

> . . . for Weber, Franklin's "philosophy of avarice" embodies "above all the idea of a duty of the individual toward the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end in itself." In other words, the "capitalist spirit" is essentially an *ethos*, a moral imperative which Weber takes pains to distinguish from questions of actual economic practice. (This fact would seem to have been overlooked by critics who, like Diana Spearman, argue against the view of Crusoe as a representative of economic man on the grounds that his solitude precludes him from engaging in market activity.) It is clear that such an ethic, with its ascetic refusal of immediate

> gratification and spontaneous enjoyment of life, takes the principle of utility to its absurd, irrational and unnatural conclusions: instead of being subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs, economic acquisition becomes the ultimate purpose of life.[137]

Tournier's Robinson is certainly imbued with this capitalist spirit. In spite of his isolation, his production is still determined by social and market considerations. This is best seen in the frustration caused by his inability to sell his products, which, far from being meant for consumption —a crime according to Franklin's canon — are meant for the market:

> J'obéirai désormais à la règle suivante: toute production est création, et donc bonne. Toute consommation est destruction, et donc mauvaise. En vérité ma situation ici est assez semblable à celle de mes compatriotes qui débarquent chaque jour par navires entiers sur les côtes du Nouveau Monde. Eux aussi doivent se plier à une morale de l'accumulation. Pour eux aussi perdre son temps est un crime, thésauriser du temps est la vertu cardinale. Thésauriser! Voici qu'à nouveau la misère de ma solitude m'est rappelée! Pour moi semer est bien, récolter est bien. Mais le mal commence lorsque je mouds le grain et cuis la pâte, car alors je travaille pour moi seul. Le colon américain peut sans remords poursuivre jusqu'à son terme le processus de la panification, car il *vendra* son pain, et l'argent qu'il entassera dans son coffre sera du temps et du travail thésaurisés. Quant à moi, hélas, ma misérable solitude me prive des bienfaits de l'argent dont je ne manque pourtant pas! (VL 61)

These reflections reveal the paradoxical nature of Robinson's work, which, instead of being geared to the satisfaction of his material needs, is actually inspired by the ethic of accumulation, while his isolation deprives him of the possibility of marketing his products.

It is moreover worth noting that, for Tournier's hero, unlike Defoe's, money is not seen simply as a means of procuring the material things desired or needed. As Purdy is quick to point out, Tournier's Robinson "has a rather different attitude to money. Renouncing any pretence of utilitarian values or any doctrine of 'human needs', his defence of money is a distillation of the capitalist spirit, claiming as it does that venality, in the form of the pursuit of personal profit, is the very source of social cohesion":[138]

> La vénalité est une vertu cardinale. L'homme vénal sait faire taire ses instincts meurtriers et associaux — sentiment de l'honneur, amour-propre, patriotisme, ambition politique, fanatisme religieux, racisme — pour ne laisser parler que sa propension à la coopération, son goût des échanges fructueux, son sens de la solidarité humaine. Il faut prendre à la lettre l'expression l'*âge d'or*, et je vois bien

[137]Purdy 225.
[138]Purdy 230.

> que l'humanité y parviendrait vite si elle n'était menée que par des hommes vénaux. (VL 62)

On the other hand, Tournier's explicit introduction of the capitalist ethic, especially à la Franklin — merging, as it does, capitalism and calvinism, evangelism and exploitation — is an ironic commentary on the evangelical myth as it is embodied in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Gérard Genette takes up this parodic dimension:

> . . . le Robinson de Defoe se contentait de mener, sous le regard respectueux de ses compagnons animaux, la vie décente et laborieuse d'un honnête chrétien; celui de Tournier s'abîme dans un simulacre névrotique d'administration, rédigeant une charte et un code pénal de Speranza, édifiant un Palais de justice, un Temple, un Conservatoire des Poids et Mesures, et revêtant un habit de cérémonie pour recenser les tortues de mer ou inaugurer des ponts et des routes; l'idéologie protestante de Defoe s'exprimait sur le mode sublime et justificatif de la lecture biblique, celle du Robinson de Tournier s'énonce et se *dénonce* sous les espèces du catéchisme productiviste de Franklin, dont il inscrit en énormes caractères les maximes moralisantes et terre-à-terre sur les rochers de Speranza, au risque d'attirer l'attention de quelques sauvages. Cette énonciation dégradante vaut évidemment pour une critique du modèle qui ne percevait ni la détermination historique (accumulation capitaliste déguisée en morale puritaine) ni la vanité de ses motivations.[139]

One of the major differences between Defoe's Robinson and Tournier's is that the former does succeed in subjugating his environment and "peopling" his solitude, whereas the latter ultimately fails to do so to his own satisfaction and has to take a completely different direction, which leads to the birth of a new man, capable of participating in the cosmic harmony of nature. Initially, Robinson, like his archetype, sees his survival in terms of subjugating the island and imposing a moral order on Speranza, "contre son ordre naturel qui n'est que l'autre nom du désordre absolu" (VL 50). "L'île administrée" is the answer to the corrosive effects of his solitude: "Contre les effets dissolvants de l'absence d'autrui, construire, organiser, légiférer étaient des remèdes souverains" (VL 79). What is striking however is that this resolve is paradoxically paralleled by Robinson's aim to adapt to his environment. His cultivation of wheat is symbolic in this regard: "Il lui semblait aussi que ce pain que lui donnerait la terre de Speranza serait la preuve qu'elle l'avait adopté. . . (VL 46).

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[139]Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 423-24.

Nevertheless, Robinson pursues his task of civilizing the island and of imposing a moral order on it. But the "pièce maîtresse" of this world is "autrui" — human company. As Robinson constructs piece by piece his substitute for "autrui," solitude paradoxically creates fissures in his human edifice:

> Car si à la surface de l'île je poursuis mon œuvre de civilisation . . . copiée sur la société humaine . . . je me sens le théâtre d'une révolution plus radicale qui substitue aux ruines que la solitude crée en moi des solutions originales . . . qui ressemblent de moins en moins au modèle humain dont elles étaient parties. (VL 116-17)

Such original solutions can be seen in Robinson's sexuality. Of course, Defoe's hero never experienced any sexual longings, but Tournier's does and has to face the problem in the absence of a companion. This leads him to sexual practices far removed from their human model.

Hence a rift slowly establishes itself between the humanization of the island and the dehumanization of its governor: "Il viendra fatalement un temps où un Robinson de plus en plus déshumanisé ne pourra plus être le gouverneur, l'architecte d'une cité de plus en plus humanisée" (VL 177). But, in spite of these waves of awareness of the terrible paradoxes of his enterprise, he does not give up. In order to resist the temptation of the mud-hole, he has to maintain himself in a state of transcendence vis-à-vis the natural world: "Il y a en moi un cosmos en gestation, mais un cosmos en gestation, cela s'appelle un chaos. Contre ce chaos, l'île administrée . . . mon seul refuge, ma seule sauvegarde" (VL 117). Robinson even proceeds to undertake the "domestication définitive de la souille," but this apparent achievement leaves him with a feeling of emptiness and despair. The absurdity of all his work tortures him mercilessly:

> Inutiles ses cultures, absurdes ses élevages, ses dépots une insulte au bon sens, ses silos une dérision, et cette forteresse, cette Charte, ce Code pénal. Pour nourrir qui? Pour protéger qui? Chacun de ses gestes, chacun de ses travaux c'était un appel lancé vers quelqu'un et demeurait sans réponse. (VL 124)

The first phase of the novel thus ends with an apparent readiness for a change of direction and for a companion to help in effecting this shift. Tournier's Robinson fails in his

endeavour to maintain a state of transcendence vis-à-vis the natural world, but that failure only makes him a more human character, with whom the reader can readily identify. The story of the struggle of an ordinary man with the horrors of isolation and alienation cannot fail to engage the sympathies of modern man. Defoe's Crusoe succeeds and he is greatly admired, and for that reason the reader's responses to him are very warm. He becomes a source of inspiration, represents human aspirations towards invincibility. On the other hand, he takes a retrospective approach to the problem of solitude because Defoe himself is limited in his imagination, in his ability to envisage other possibilities that may come with a readiness to experiment, to try other modes of existence apart from those canonized by civilization. In this respect, one can say that Tournier's novel is more inventive than Defoe's. In the second phase of the novel which, in many respects and for obvious reasons, has no direct equivalent in Defoe's novel, we see Tournier going beyond the limitations which confine Defoe's hero.

Madeleine Chapsal provides a good summary of the spirit of the second phase, a tribute also to Tournier's inventiveness:

> C'est l'arrivée de Vendredi qui fait pencher l'édifice: après une période maître-esclave très strictement vécue, Robinson se laisse séduire par l'animalité et la paresse quasi cosmique de son serviteur. Au lieu de s'opposer à l'île, à la nature, aux éléments et de lutter agressivement avec eux, . . . il glisse dans un abandon qui ne ressemble pas au premier, qui n'est pas renoncement mais adoration, accord panthéiste et finalement sagesse. . . La plus grande séduction du livre, c'est bien évidemment de nous inviter à ce jeu quasiment irrésistible, le jeu consistant, pour l'enfant à tenter de se passer de papa et maman et de voir ce qui arriverait. . . Pour les adultes de se passer de la civilisation et de la société, et Michel Tournier trouve à la question toute une série de réponses plus ou moins tragiques ou ingénieuses.[148]

Defoe's Crusoe does not dream of doing without civilization; the boys in *Coral Island* do without "papa" and "mama" precisely because they have a sufficient baggage of civilization; Golding's novel illustrates that the children cannot do without "papa," "mama" and civilization combined, although the presence of the latter does not guarantee "survival" in the large social context. The uniqueness of Tournier's creation is clear. The importance of

[148]Chapsal 41-42.

Vendredi in Robinson's ultimate enlightenment, added to the eponymous status of Vendredi in Tournier's novel, may even suggest that the latter is turning the tables and writing an apology of Friday, so badly treated, or ignored, by Defoe, Rousseau and Marx. Tournier claims in an interview that his is a "roman rousseauiste."[141] However, such a comment is just part of the characteristic irony of Tournier, and should not be taken too seriously, if only because of the other comments he makes on the subject in other texts, and especially in *Le Vent Paraclet*. Gérard Genette remarks that, if the title suggests an apology of the noble savage, such an apology is still filtered through the lenses of Crusoe, the focal centre of the narrative point of view:

> . . . le titre dit bien (très bien) ce qu'il veut dire. Mais, d'une manière à mes yeux très significative, dans ce livre intitulé *Vendredi*, la narration reste pour l'essentiel . . . focalisée sur Robinson. Cette apologie du bon sauvage est bien faite, comme toujours, par le civilisé, et l'auteur même ne s'y identifie nullement à Vendredi, mais bien à Robinson: un Robinson fasciné et finalement converti par Vendredi, mais qui demeure le foyer — je dirais volontiers le *maître* du récit, et d'un récit qui raconte son histoire, et non celle de Vendredi. Quelqu'un, ici, dit "Vendredi avait raison," mais ce quelqu'un, malgré une dévocalisation de surface, c'est toujours Robinson. Le véritable *Vendredi*, où Robinson serait vu, décrit et jugé par Vendredi, reste à écrire. Mais ce *Vendredi*-là, aucun Robinson — fût-il le mieux disposé — ne peut l'écrire.[142]

Thus, in spite of the change in title and a certain promotion of Vendredi, Tournier's novel still remains the story of Robinson Crusoe.

The arrival of Vendredi does not radically change the direction of the novel. Robinson's initial attitude to Vendredi is not very different from what can be seen in Defoe's novel. If anything, Robinson is, as Tournier points out, terribly disappointed by this answer to his prayer for human companionship: "le drame de la solitude s'exhalant dans un appel à un compagnon, puis se trouvant soudain étouffé, suffoqué par la survenue d'un compagnon en effet, mais inattendu, surprenant, une déception affreuse — un nègre!" (VP 232). Vendredi is thus called upon to play very ambiguous roles. As a human being, his presence is supposed to justify Robinson's system which, as we have seen, is imbued with social meaning.

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[141] "Quand Vendredi éduque Robinson" 10
[142] Genette 424.

His arrival on the scene will then water down one of the paradoxes of "l'île administrée," as Vendredi will now be the subject and consumer in Crusoe's kingdom. At the same time, he is supposed to replace the symbolic replica of "autrui" which "l'île administrée" has become. And, finally, he is to be the spiritual mentor, the guide and "accoucheur à l'homme nouveau" — the result of the "cosmos" which has been brewing in Robinson and which must now become his new being.

Not surprisingly, Robinson's first instinct is to stress the most basic of these roles: "Il crut même . . . que la présence du nouveau venu allait apporter à son organisation une justification, un poids, un équilibre qui mettraient fin définitivement aux périls qui l'avaient menacé" (VL 153). In this respect, Vendredi is seen only as another element to be incorporated into Robinson's system. The initial significance of the name Robinson gives to the newcomer translates the metonymic and fortuitous image he has of Vendredi. The name "Vendredi" is perfectly suited to this quasi-human companion: "Ce n'est ni un nom de personne, ni un nom commun, c'est, à mi-chemin entre les deux, celui d'une entité à demi vivante, à demi abstraite, fortement marquée par son caractère temporel, fortuit et comme épisodique..." (VL 147-48) One can to some extent say that Tournier's Robinson is still imbued with some of the racist ethos of his eighteenth-century counterpart. But his racism is far less canonized by the values of the civilization from which he is exiled. It is informed by pragmatic considerations. In Anthony Purdy's view, we cannot even talk about slavery in this context,

> . . . for Vendredi is far more useful to Robinson as a wage-earner, and it is as such that Speranza's Governor tries to integrate him into the island's economy, thinking to find a use for the money saved from the wreck while, at the same time, solving the problem of a capitalist system with no market to justify it: "Il paie Vendredi. Un demi-souverain d'or par mois. Au début il avait pris soin de 'placer' la totalité de ces sommes à un intérêt de 5,5%. Puis, considérant que Vendredi avait atteint mentalement l'âge de raison, il lui laissa la libre disposition de ses arrérages."[143]

It is also significant that this twentieth-century Robinson no longer embodies the evangelical

[143]Purdy 231.

myth. He is a capitalist and, although he initially believes that Vendredi is the product of a rudimentary, primitive and barbaric culture, he makes little attempt to catechize and civilize him. There is no real effort on the part of Robinson to culturally assimilate Vendredi; it is essentially as an economic component that he seeks to integrate Vendredi into his system. This is radically different from the attitude of Defoe's Crusoe and Ballantyne's boys, who see it as a sacred mission for Western man to spread the light of Civilization among the strange and supposedly barbaric peoples they come across. But such a puritan preoccupation has been seen to be part of a smokescreen for the more real capitalist motivations of the European evangelism of that period. Thus it is that Tournier can doubt that Rousseau ever really read Defoe's novel — for if he had, how could he have used it to idealize the noble savage? "Voilà un homme (Robinson) qui aborde dans une île déserte, la souille et la dénature, qui rencontre des (bons) sauvages et les massacre, qui en sauve un et n'a rien de plus pressé que de le pervertir, de lui apprendre . . . la civilisation. C'est croire que Jean-Jacques n'a . . . pas lu Defoe . . ."[144] Tournier's Robinson is less hypocritical in this respect. He does not see himself as an evangelist, nor does he act as one. It is as a man struggling with the terrible paradoxes of his unique situation that he defines his relationship with Vendredi.

On the other hand, Robinson realizes early enough that "Vendredi, sous sa docilité empressée, avait une personnalité, et que tout ce qui en émanait le choquait profondément et portait atteinte à l'intégrité de l'île administrée" (VL 109). Not only is Vendredi refractory to Robinson's system, he also poses an unspoken threat to it. He is the "autrui" who provides another point of view regarding Robinson's universe. Robinson has expressed his desire for such another perception of the world and himself, without which, as we have seen, not only will he be uncertain as to the reality of the world he is not immediately perceiving, but he will also not be certain about anything at all, since everything depends on his own perceptions and judgements, which have proved so far, to say the least, unreliable, posing a threat to his

[144] "Quand Vendredi éduque Robinson" 10.

sanity. Marcel Lobet explains this role of "autrui":

> [Robinson] découvre bien avant l'arrivée de Vendredi le rôle d'autrui dans la vie normale. Seul l'Autre donne l'échelle à notre représentation de la vie: il multiplie les points de vue. Or dans la solitude absolue, cette perspective essentielle est abolie.[143]

The arrival of Vendredi provides this long-awaited other point of view. Ironically, the presence of Vendredi, instead of remedying the psychological effects of the lack of another point of view, heightens Robinson's awareness of his madness: ". . . sa présence suffit déjà à ébranler l'organisation de l'île, car visiblement il ne comprend rien à tout cela et Robinson se voit dans ses yeux et ne peut plus désormais ne pas juger sa propre folie. Vendredi sème le doute dans un système qui ne tenait que par la force d'une conviction aveugle" (VP 234). Robinson, for example, invents a furniture polish, although he has no furniture on the island. This undertaking is similar to his boat-building. When the polish is ready, then he realizes that his product is completely useless. He eventually finds a "good use" for it:

> Finalement il a eu l'idée de faire cirer par Vendredi les galets et les cailloux de la voie principale, celle qui dévale de la grotte vers la Baie du Salut dont Robinson emprunta le tracé le jour même de son arrivée dans l'île. La valeur historique de cette voie lui parut à la réflexion justifier ce travail énorme, que la moindre averse réduisait à néant et dont il s'était demandé au début s'il était bien raisonnable de l'imposer à Vendredi. (VL 126)

Instead of mitigating the perils of madness, Vendredi's unspoken perspective progressively makes Robinson realize that he is in effect already a madman.

Vendredi does not represent another civilization. In fact, Tournier considers him as being "vierge de civilisation"; but he does present another possible mode of existence, which is not based on transcendence or the logic of subordination. And in this respect he represents another system which quietly challenges Robinson's. Who will adapt to whom? The opposition between the two is primarily translated in their different attitudes to work. Vendredi maintains a playful attitude to his environment, which offers him infinite possibilities for "useless" creations — activities based, not on any principle of subordination

[143]Lobet 111. See also, on this point, Deleuze, passim.

or economic gain, but on the sheer, aesthetic delight that can be gained from creation itself. Vendredi, in one memorable episode, effects a transformation of the natural environment very much analogous to Robinson's, but according to entirely different principles:

> Des masques de bois, une sarbacane, un hamac de lianes où reposait un mannequin de raphia, des coiffes de plumes, des peaux de reptile, des cadavres desséchés d'oiseaux étaient les indices d'un univers secret dont Robinson n'avait pas la clef. Mais sa surprise fut à son comble lorsqu'il déboucha au bord d'un marigot que bordaient de petits arbres assez semblables à des saules. En effet ces arbustes avaient tous été visiblement déracinés et replantés *à l'envers*, les branches enfouies dans la terre et les racines dressées vers le ciel. Et ce qui achevait de donner un aspect fantastique à cette plantation monstrueuse, c'est qu'ils paraissaient tous s'être accommodés de ce traitement barbare. Des pousses vertes et même des touffes de feuilles apparaissaient à la pointe des racines, ce qui supposait que les branches enterrées avaient su se métamorphoser elles-mêmes en racines, et que la sève avait inversé le sens de sa circulation. Robinson ne pouvait s'arracher à l'examen de ce phénomène. Que Vendredi ait eu cette fantaisie et l'ait exécutée était déjà assez inquiétant. Mais les arbustes avaient accepté ce traitement, Speranza avait acquiescé apparemment à cette extravagance. (VL 163)

This vision presents to Robinson an alternative relationship to the environment that he has been ignoring so far. The reader knows already that in the confrontation of these two views of life, of these two possibilities of being, Vendredi will emerge unpretentiously victorious.

The structure of Tournier's novel is not built on a logic of chance. The reader knows beforehand the result of this confrontation, because he knows the story already, if only through the "discours proleptique" which opens the novel. The episode of the rats also provides an additional indicator: "un animal qui se bat sur le territoire de son adversaire a toujours le dessous. Ce jour-là, tous les rats noirs périrent" (VL 87). This apparently banal episode prefigures the victory of Vendredi's ethic of harmony with the environment. The episode of the return of Robinson's dog, Tenn, is also revealing. Initially Robinson thinks that "il était en somme naturel que le chien fût retourné à l'état sauvage" (VL 32). But when the dog returns after a year's absence, Robinson, much wiser now, realizes that "ce fut mon air farouche et mon visage égaré qui rebutèrent la pauvre bête, demeurée plus profondément civilisée que moi" (VL 64). This statement raises a question about the concept of civilization that was never raised by Defoe or Ballantyne. For the latter, Civilization is monolithic,

exclusively Western and must be distinguished from all other forms of being (if these could be brought under the banner of civilization) by being capitalized. Tenn adapts to his non-English (and hence uncivilized) environment, but it is Robinson, who can achieve civilization only by maintaining a transcendental relationship with his environment, that is the real savage. In Golding's view, the savage is in every man. To Michel Tournier, there are no true savages; only people having a different mode of existence. This is a radical position vis-à-vis the eurocentrism that pervades Defoe's and Ballantyne's novels.

Tournier's Robinson becomes more and more aware of the narrow-mindedness of his archetypes. He continues working but does not believe in it anymore. He becomes a slave to his system, while awaiting the birth of "l'homme nouveau." His personality becomes schizophrenic and, on the eve of the decisive moment, two voices in him confront each other: "Il y avait toujours quelqu'un en lui qui attendait un événement décisif, bouleversant, un commencement radicalement nouveau qui frapperait de nullité toute entreprise passée ou future. Puis le vieil homme protestait, s'accrochant à son œuvre" (VL 181-82). When the event finally takes place, Robinson feels relieved "emporté, tandis qu'il voit le chaos rocheux qui surmonte la grotte culbuter comme un jeu de construction . . ." (VL 104). And we are told that "un nouveau Robinson se débattait dans sa vieille peau et acceptait à l'avance de laisser crouler l'île administrée pour s'enfoncer à la suite d'un initiateur irresponsable dans une voie inconnue" (VL 189). The changes, following this explosion, are radical. Robinson decides to shave: "du même coup, il avait perdu son aspect solennel et patriarcal . . . il avait ainsi rajeuni d'une génération" (VL 191). On a symbolic level, this act forms part of the initiation rites.

The initiator is Vendredi, but the new relationship formed between Vendredi and Robinson, as Anthony Purdy rightly observes, is not a simple matter of role reversal:

> In fact, the dialectic of master and slave is left behind, as are the metaphysics of subordination implicit in the Calvinist world-view. The "île administrée" had been Robinson's response to the temptations of the mud-hole and the descent into

> animality; the economic order had been a transcendence in time of that state, a transcendence founded on the prohibition "Thou shalt not enjoy" and the corresponding ethic of production, utility and accumulation. The new world that emerges after the explosion represents not a transcendence but a transgression of the economic order: the sanctification of the world by play instead of by work, the metamorphosis of *homo economicus* (the transcendent form of *homo faber*) into *homo ludens* (the transgressive form of *homo faber*).[144]

The name of Vendredi, which before had only a derisive definition now becomes the centre of "un écheveau de significations" (VL 228). While Defoe's Crusoe can progress only within the standards and limitations of the society upon which he models his achievements, Tournier's Robinson ultimately discovers more than he seeks to achieve by his "île administrée." Vendredi's eventual meaning transcends Robinson's system: "[I]l est pour moi toute l'humanité rassemblée en un seul individu, mon fils et mon père, mon frère et mon voisin, mon prochain, mon lointain" (VL 224).

The relationship between Robinson and his environment also undergoes radical changes. Robinson, in his truly inventive spree, has practised what he broadly calls "la sexualité élémentaire." He makes love to a tree and to mother earth. But now his sexuality is taken to an even higher status: "Il ne s'agissait pas de me faire régresser vers des amours humaines, mais sans sortir de l'élémentaire de me faire changer d'élément" (VL 229). Robinson is finally promoted to the sexuality of the gods, ". . . la fécondation de l'Astre Majeure" (VL 230). Hence, it is no longer a simple question of harmony with nature and the elements; Robinson becomes himself an element, achieves a status higher than that of his initiator (who is "eolien"); he becomes a solar being — "un être solaire." The pragmatic question about the sex-life of the adult, which is not raised by Defoe, is posed by Tournier. But as for many of his questions, the answer is not found at home in England; it is found somewhere in this timeless limbo that Speranza finally becomes.

The most significant modification of the Crusoe story, then, is Robinson's decision to sacrifice human time with all its vicissitudes for an eternal cosmic present, his renunciation of

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[144]Purdy 233.

"salvation" à la Defoe. That the enlightened Robinson Crusoe is repelled by the cupidity, opportunism and earthiness of the crew of the *Whitebird* is the most immediate and probably the most prosaic explanation of his refusal to be "rescued" by this ship. He even feels like vomiting when he thinks of the crew's rapacity. It is above all a certain conception of life that revolts him — life that is subjected to the contingencies of linear and relative time. Before his conversion his conception of time is relative and utilitarian. Robinson, then, can feel fulfilled only by relating time to the amount of work he is able to accomplish. Tied as it is to man's daily work and achievements, he can conceive time only in terms of past, present and future, a painful reminder not of eternity but of transience, ageing, death. The world of which the crewmen are part is held in bondage to this volatile and relative notion of time which Robinson denounces:

> Il le dénonçait par devers lui-même dans l'irrémédiable relativité des fins qu'il les voyait tous poursuivre fiévreusement. Car ce qu'ils avaient tous en but c'était telle acquisition, telle richesse, telle satisfaction, mais pourquoi cette acquisition, cette richesse, cette satisfaction? Certes aucun d'entre eux ne saurait le dire. (VL: 243)

Freed from this materialistic, utilitarian and relativistic conception of time, Robinson can now enjoy absolute time, an eternal present — a life-style that calls for the spontaneous enjoyment of every moment without relating it to another or to a utilitarian activity such as work: "Chaque matin était pour lui un premier commencement, le commencement absolu de l'histoire du monde. Sous le soleil-dieu, Speranza vibrait dans un présent perpétuel, sans passé ni avenir" (VL 246).

Defoe's novel and an aspect of the Crusoe myth present the shipwreck as a disaster. But the twentieth-century Crusoe comes to consider the shipwreck as a fortunate disaster precisely because Speranza the geographical island turns out to be an island in time, a cocoon that preserves the castaway in an eternal and 'mineral' youthfulness. It is finally this youthfulness that Crusoe cannot afford to give up: "Il n'allait pas s'arracher à cet éternel instant, posé en équilibre à la pointe d'un paroxysme de perfection, pour choir dans un

monde d'usure, de poussière et de ruines" (VL 246). Time is thus a central motif in Tournier's novel and our study would be incomplete without some detailed reflections on this aspect of the novel, "le temps," both chronological and meteorological. In the last scenes of the novel, we are told that Crusoe, "comme un mourant avant de rendre l'âme . . . embrassait d'une vision panoramique toute sa vie dans l'île, surtout cette vaste plage de temps où sa métamorphose solaire s'était accomplie dans un calme bonheur" (VL 234).

Defoe's Crusoe is consistently meticulous about recording the time he spends in isolation. This is because, in spite of all his achievements on the island, Crusoe still remains in every sense of the word a man of the world, and every minute spent away from it must be religiously recorded. The boys in *Coral Island* are not so fastidious about time, but this is because they can afford to sacrifice a few years as they are still young. Golding's boys are not conscious about the passing of time, because such consciousness is part of the element of "Civilization" from which they slowly, but surely, drift away. In Tournier's novel, time is a central motif. In fact, Robinson remarks that ". . . tout le problème dans cette île pourrait se traduire en termes de temps" (VL 60). Robinson's attempts to subjugate his environment are paralleled by an attempt to subjugate time. Since all his work is oriented towards the future, the mud-hole — its antithesis — signifies a dissolution of time and space: "Le temps et l'espace se dissolvaient" (VL 41). Which is why he sees his isolation on the island also in terms of an isolation in time: "Robinson se trouvait coupé du calendrier des hommes, comme il était séparé par les eaux, et réduit à vivre sur un îlot de temps dans l'espace" (VL 45). His resolve to subjugate time and space is thus understandable, as he establishes a calendar and a map of the island. There is also a relationship between Robinson's work and time. He will succeed in his enterprise only if he imprisons time. Since he has no possibility of subduing time, as do his compatriots in the New World (through the money earned by their work), Robinson cannot consume his products. Nothing of "cette première récolte ne doit s'engloutir dans le présent. Elle doit être tout entière comme un ressort tourné vers l'avenir" (VL 60). As

he perseveres in his project of 'civilizing' the island, he can no longer be satisfied with measuring and monitoring time metaphorically; he needs a machine to do so literally — a water-clock. As a result, "le temps ne glissait plus . . . dans un abîme obscur, mais . . . se trouvait désormais régularisé, maîtrisé, bref domestiqué lui aussi, comme toute l'île allait le devenir peu à peu, par la force d'âme d'un seul homme" (VL 67).

With this digital and concrete measurement of time which the water-clock permits, it is no longer necessary for Robinson to deprive himself of consuming some of his products. But, as one would expect, such use is symbolic. He decides to make bread because bread-making enables him to participate in "l'élément à la fois matériel et spirituel de la communauté humaine perdue" (VL 80). Here, as in many other cases, Tournier asks questions that are often raised about the superfluous and extravagant nature of Crusoe's work. The stopping of the machine brings about a marvellous discovery for Robinson: "Il était donc possible d'échapper à l'implacable discipline du temps et des cérémonies sans pour autant retomber dans la souille" (VL 94). Robinson's hegemonic attitude to his environment and to time corresponds to the spirit of his eighteenth century archetype, but he distances himself from the latter by his ready responsiveness to immediate experience, his ability to question established convictions and thus to learn and grow. With this specific discovery, we are told, Robinson climbs "un degré dans la métamorphose qui travaillait le plus secret de lui-même"(VL 94). He still has a long way to go, but this vision of time creates a new vision of the island: "Speranza n'était plus un domaine à gérer, mais une *personne* de nature indiscutablement féminine . . ." (VL 101-02). This phase is however transcended and, once more, Robinson decides to pursue his work and naturally the water-clock goes back to work: "La clepsydre reprit son tic-tac, et l'activité dévorante de Robinson emplit à nouveau le ciel et la terre de Speranza" (VL 115). The water-clock stops again in the ninth chapter and for Vendredi this signifies "la suppression d'un certain ordre" (VL 162), and so he takes a leave of absence in order to indulge in his own version of work — a transformation of the island on

principles entirely different from his master's. When Vendredi finally and unwittingly causes the explosion in the cave, Robinson's vision of time is radically transformed: "Le temps s'est figé au moment où la clepsydre volait en éclats. Dès lors n'est-ce pas dans l'éternité que nous sommes installés, Vendredi et moi?" (VL 219). Robinson has already experienced "l'intemporel," in a circumscribed way, in the cave. It is this same eternity held within the depths of the cave that the explosion "a chassé au-dehors, et qui étend maintenant sa bénédiction sur tous [les] rivages" (VL 220). The final metamorphosis of Robinson takes places on this "vaste plage de temps."

Parallel to Robinson's acceptance of the island is his accession to "une jeunesse minérale, divine, solaire" (VL 24). The meteorological elements are not only accepted but experienced in intense intimacy. Robinson's conversion is radical: he himself becomes a meteorological element — a solar being. Time as it is lived by Defoe's Crusoe — time as a barometer by which man measures his victory over his environment, a "productive" conception of time with all its vicissitudes, is refuted by Tournier's hero in his radical decision to stay on the island rather than go back to society.

It is thus the second part of Tournier's novel that is most radically different from the spirit of Defoe's novel and the myth it has generated. Michel Tournier deliberately magnifies the extravagant and superfluous nature of Robinson's work when it is considered to be exclusively geared to the satisfaction of his material and physical needs. No longer will this twentieth-century Crusoe attempt to camouflage the economic and symbolic nature of his work. He is neither the noble savage that Rousseau idealizes nor is he the utilitarian that Marx supposes him to be.

Robinson Crusoe, as Baudrillard would put it, is a 'structure idéologique' — the product of a certain culture which continues to inform and determine every activity he undertakes during his period of isolation. The inherent paradoxes of his work are glaringly obvious first to the reader and eventually to himself. It is this ultimate awareness that puts

him on the path of change and growth; growth which by definition is prospective — a distancing from his origins, a readiness to experiment and accept forms of being other than those once held to be absolute. The enlightened Robinson is thus freed from the bonds and constructs of Western civilization. William Golding questions the myth of the superiority of Western culture, as does Michel Tournier implicitly, if only by having a man from the Third World (a black) as the initiator and mentor of his hero. But the final visions of the two authors are different. In our conclusion we will recall the ideological positions of the two authors and conclude this study by examining the similarities and differences in their reactions to the Crusoe myth.

CONCLUSION

The distance between *Robinson Crusoe* and *Coral Island* is roughly the distance between Defoe's novel and the myth it generated in the nineteenth century. In other words, *Coral Island* is more or less a fictional rendering of some of the ideas and ideologies that were thought to be embodied in Robinson Crusoe. To start with, in spite of the popular image of Crusoe as the natural man, Defoe's hero does not at all correspond to Rousseau's concept of the 'bon sauvage' and the attendant ideologies relating to the dignity of labour and utilitarianism. Ballantyne's boys, on the other hand, are prone to romantic reverie that is much closer to Rousseau, and their life on the island illustrates, if only imperfectly, a certain utilitarian ethic.

Moreover, *Robinson Crusoe*, as we have seen, is a prophecy and not a fulfillment of empire. For, although Crusoe travels widely and even creates a colony on his island, he never really succeeds as a colonialist or as an empire-builder. But, by the time *Coral Island* was published in the nineteenth century, British colonial expansion and trade were at their peak and Robinson Crusoe had been crowned with the laurels of the archetypal empire-builder. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Ballantyne's 'collective Crusoe' should win some hitherto barbaric islands over to the British Crown. Robinson Crusoe has also come to be hailed as an evangelist. But in Defoe, his missionary work is limited to his conversion of Xury and Friday. In this regard, as in many others, his achievements appear somewhat frail when compared to those of the nineteenth-century juvenile Crusoes who spectacularly convert whole communities in the Pacific. That Ballantyne's boys succeed both as empire-builders and as evangelists is perfectly understandable since British imperial expansion in the nineteenth century went hand in hand with fervent missionary activity. As critics have pointed out, Crusoe's accomplishments on his island lose some of their power to impress when one

considers the role played by the salvaged goods. Maximillian Novak alludes to Bohm Bawerk who asked his readers to imagine Crusoe on his island without his tools. But, as Novak observes, Defoe could not have written his story on these lines. Not even Crusoe himself considers his achievements in his period of isolation as exceptional — anyone in his situation could do the same thing. After all, necessity is the mother of invention. And yet, Robinson Crusoe has come to be remembered as a Promethean figure, the castaway who triumphantly survived his terrible period of isolation — a testimony to the invincibility of the human spirit. Ballantyne's novel, like many others of the period, canonizes this aspect of the myth. Which is why, unlike Defoe's hero, Ballantyne's boys salvage hardly anything from the shipwreck. As if this were not enough in terms of the problems the castaways have to face, their plurality, their ages and their disparate temperaments, as well as the presence of fierce and hostile neighbours, become just the ingredients for the writing of a fabulous success story.

As this study has shown, the Crusoe myth relates to a number of ideas and ideologies that have been shaped by the European historical and cultural landscape, all of them predicated either on the essential goodness of human nature or on the vitality and superiority of Western culture. Both Golding and Tournier, whose views are marked not only by their witnessing the birth of the spectral brainchildren of the West's 'progressive' ideologies — totalitarianism and apocalyptic aggression — but also by developments in the areas of psychology and anthropology, react critically to some of the ideologies underlying the myth. For Golding, the lesson learned through all this is that of universal human depravity. We should, however, bear in mind that this belief in a diseased creation is a position that Golding takes as a consequence, primarily, of the events of the Second World War which he witnessed at close range. Evidence from his more recent pronouncements on the subject indicates that his vision of human destiny and his general view of human nature have lost much of their sombreness. But just after the war his pessimism was unmistakable:

> I believed then that man was sick — not exceptional man but average man. I believed that the condition of man was to be a morally diseased creation and that the best job I could do at the time, was to trace the connection between his diseased nature and the international mess he gets himself into.[147]

Golding's vision in *Lord of the Flies* is thus pessimistic; there seems to be no way out, as man, every man, is born with the terrible illness of being human.

Michel Tournier's approach is, in an important sense, less universal in scope and this is seen even in the characterization. Golding, by presenting many characters, emphasizes not individual isolation but the larger issues of social organization and government, which he relates to the constitutions of the individual members of the social unit. In Michel Tournier's novel, the emphasis is first of all on the effect of solitude on the individual. His novel deals with the struggle of the individual who remains in every way a social being while his isolation makes it impossible for him to fulfill himself in terms of the constructs of the civilization from which he is literally exiled. The myth has presented Crusoe as being capable of surviving his isolation precisely because he had become the 'natural man' who had to work simply for the satisfaction of his needs, needs presented as autonomous and non-social. The myth ignores Crusoe's ethic of accumulation and the socio-economic dynamics of his labour and its products. Michel Tournier simply makes very explicit the social character of Crusoe's work and turns it, in the context of the castaway's isolation, into the paradox which is at the origin of the collapse of Crusoe's system. Were Tournier's novel to stop at the collapse of Robinson's system, we would have a pessimistic vision. But the failure of Tournier's Robinson is simply a prelude to the latter's attainment of salvation in terms of a new mythology.

Since Golding's concern is with the innate depravity of the human soul, he does not need to have his boys meet with 'savage' tribes; the savage is already in all of them. Michel Tournier's interest in ethnography and his sympathies with the Third World, which has seen

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[147]Golding, *The Hot Gates* 87.

its cultures destroyed and its wealth plundered, ensure the ideological transformation of what, in Defoe's novel, was the encounter of Civilized Europe and the dark world of savages. Not only is Tournier's Vendredi no longer the barbaric cannibal that his archetypes are presented as being, not only does his salvation no longer depend on the goodwill and the Bible of the imperial Crusoes, but, in what seems like a radical inversion of the myth, the salvation of the man from the West is now contingent on his readiness to shed his claim to racial superiority and to accept the guidance of the once despised blackman — Vendredi. The nineteenth-century myth sanctifies colonialism by giving it a religious and humanistic justification, but now it is the anti-imperialist discourse that is sanctified.

Nevertheless, Tournier's novel is still about Robinson Crusoe, because, as Gérard Genette indicates, Vendredi's novel — a novel written from the perspective of the colonized — cannot be written by any Robinson (not even Tournier's), however well-meaning. Tournier himself says that such a novel remains to be written. But it may be that it has been and continues to be written elsewhere in the world. It would be very interesting in this respect to take up Tournier's conception of "negritude" and relate it to some of the more important themes of African fiction.

Because of the complexity and topicality of the ideas and issues that Robinson Crusoe embodies, he will continue to be honoured, ridiculed, but never ignored, for as long as these ideas are of any relevance to us. Perhaps colonialism will one day be forgotten as a spectre of the past. We may even forget that the Bible was transported to the Third World aboard merchant ships. Likewise, the problems of solitude and alienation may one day be remembered as part of the sickness of past centuries; radio and television commercials may one day no longer try and convince the public to make their hair natural by applying chemical products. Even the prospect of spending a vacation on some lush and exotic tropical island (Hawaii, Tahiti etc.) might one day lose its appeal. But as long as all or some of these issues, ideas and dreams are part of the cultural reality of the West, Robinson Crusoe is here to stay.

And just as civilizations constantly re-examine and even ridicule those values they once cherished, so are their myths at once permanent, dynamic and always evolving. The Robinson Crusoe myth as it evolved in the nineteenth century represents a very optimistic view of Western civilization. And so shall the images of this culture-hero live on and match the endurance of the sphinx which adorn the deserts of Egypt — mocking reminders of a Civilization which once had a settled sense of its own glorious destiny.

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